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ABSTRACT

Prepared by educators and researchers involved in argumentation and debate, the articles in this special journal issue are based upon the assumptions that presidential debates are important, are likely to continue, and are of unique interest to students, scholars, and practitioners of argument. The first two articles in the issue provide overviews of both presidential debates and of the place of the debates in the 1980 campaign. The next three articles analyze respectively the impact of the controversy over whether the candidates would debate at all, the basic debate strategy and specific argumentative tactics of candidate Ronald Reagan and his advisers, and the types of statements employed by President Jimmy Carter, John Anderson, and Reagan in the debates, as well as the types of issues each addressed. The two remaining articles examine how Reagan came to be regarded as the "winner" of the debates with Carter, and how the various formats for televised political debates affected the debates themselves. The journal issue also contains a selected bibliography of materials dealing with presidential campaign debating. (FL)

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SPECIAL ISSUE

THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Guest Editor:
KURT W. RITTER
University of Missouri-Columbia

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INTRODUCTION: AN INAUGURAL ISSUE ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

KURT W. RITTER
Guest Editor

With this issue *Speaker and Gavel* inaugurates what may become a regular, quadrennial issue on the debates of the preceding presidential campaign. This projection and this special issue are based upon three assumptions: 1) presidential debates are important; 2) presidential debates are likely to continue to occur; and 3) presidential debates are of unique interest to students, scholars, and practitioners of argument—the sort of people who read this journal.

None of these assumptions is universally accepted, with the possible exception of the first. Any instance of political communication viewed by 100 million (or even 50 million) voters during a presidential campaign by its very nature becomes an important event. Presidential debates have varied and will continue to vary in their quality, their usefulness to voters, and their political impact, but it seems unlikely that they will become unimportant. Because presidential debates have been relatively unusual events, one political communication researcher has urged that "fewer [research] resources should be expended on them in the future."[1] Happily, such advice continues to be ignored. A preliminary bibliography indicates that since 1960 some seven books and approximately 100 scholarly articles have been published on presidential debates. Few of these studies, however, have focused on the argumentative aspects of the debates.

Much more problematic is the question of whether presidential debates will continue as a regular feature of presidential campaigns. As Robert L. Scott points out later in this issue, in one sense a presidential candidate cannot not debate—he or she must at least debate about whether a debate will occur. On the basic issue, however, the future is less clear. Certainly debates are now viewed by both candidates and their advisors as vehicles for challengers and as threats to an incumbent.[2] Despite this, the last two incumbent presidents have agreed to debate—or, at least, they were unable to avoid a debate. An explanation to this contradiction may be found in the difficult times now facing any president. After four years of struggling with intractable problems, no incumbent is likely to be high enough in the public opinion polls to be able to arrogantly refuse to debate.[3] In fact, our experience with political debates has advanced to the point that Robert Friedenberg has been able to predict the conditions under which a political debate will occur.[4]

Those who teach and practice debate and argumentation have not expressed a universal interest in presidential debates, but there are indica-

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[1] Charles K. Atkin, "Political Campaigns: Mass Communication and Persuasion," in *Persuasion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, eds. Michael E. Roloff and Gerald R. Miller (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980), p. 304.

[2] Elizabeth Drew, "A Reporter at Large—1980: The Election," *The New Yorker* (Dec. 1, 1980), pp. 157–58.

[3] I borrow this line of argument from Charls E. Walker, cochairperson of the 1976 Debates Steering Committee. For Walker's discussion, see Austin Ranney, ed., *The Past and Future of Presidential Debates* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), p. 51.

[4] See Robert V. Friedenberg, "'We Are Present Today for the Purpose of Having a Joint Discussion': The Conditions Requisite for Political Debates," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 16 (1979), 1–9.

tions that an important segment of the educational debate community is turning its attention to political debates. The most striking example is the role of Myles Martel in Ronald Reagan's campaign. Martel, who is a professor of speech communication and a former debate coach, has detailed the work of Reagan's Debate Task Force in which he played a major role.[5] Debate educators have also been sought out by sponsors of debates to help devise fair and useful debate formats. Mike Pfau of Augustana College (South Dakota), for example, was instrumental in implementing a series of televised debates involving candidates for the U.S. House of Representative and the U.S. Senate in the 1980 elections. In South Carolina, William Strickland played a similar part in planning the Republican Presidential Primary Debate which was sponsored by the University of South Carolina and the Columbia (S.C.) Newspapers, Inc., and was televised nationally on the Public Broadcasting System. A final bit of evidence on this point comes from the American Forensic Association which has created an Ad Hoc Committee on Public Political Debate, chaired by Dorothy Kirn Sorensen of the University of Tennessee.

Whether the present special issue on the 1980 presidential debates becomes an inaugural issue depends, of course, on whether the foregoing assumptions prove sound. In 1984 we will know.

The essays in this issue reflect a widespread research effort by those involved in argumentation and debate. The introductory essays by J. Jeffery Auer and Robert Weiss provide overviews of both presidential debates in general, and the place of the 1980 debates in the 1980 campaign in particular.

Robert Scott, Myles Martel, Patricia Riley and Thomas Hollihan analyze respectively: 1) the impact of the controversy over whether the candidates would debate at all; 2) the basic debate strategy and specific argumentative tactics of the Reagan camp; and 3) the types of statements employed by John Anderson, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan in the debates as well as the types of issues they addressed.

The concluding section of this issue includes an examination by David Leuthold and David Valentine of why Reagan came to be regarded as the "winner" of his debate with Carter. The issue concludes with a practical question—how do the various formats for televised political debates affect the debates themselves? This comparative study by Susan Hellweg and Steven Phillips is particularly rich in information because they examine three debates from the Republican primary elections as well as the two major debates in Baltimore and Cleveland.

This special issue would not have been possible without the support of a number of people and institutions. The present editor of *Speaker and Gavel*, Bill Balthrop, not only enthusiastically supported the idea of a special issue, but willingly provided the guest editor with the authority necessary to carry out the project. The Department of Speech and Dramatic Art at the University of Missouri–Columbia provided office supplies, duplicating services and related support, including the cost of a computer-assisted bibliography on presidential debates. The Graduate School and Office of Research at the University of Missouri–Columbia eased the task of the guest editor by providing a Summer Research Fellowship. Finally, the most important supporters of the issue were the contributors—both those whose essays are included here and others. The response to the call for essays was so great that for each essay accepted, five other manuscripts had to be turned away. To all, thank you.

[5] See Martel's essay, "Debate Preparations in the Reagan Camp: An Insider's View," in this issue of *Speaker and Gavel*.

GREAT MYTHS ABOUT THE GREAT DEBATES

J. JEFFERY AUER

In what appears retrospectively to have been a moment of unwarranted euphoria, a volume of studies reporting on the joint press conferences of Richard Nixon and John Kennedy in the 1960 presidential campaign was titled *The Great Debates*.[1] A subsequent volume devoted to the similar undertakings of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter in 1976 bore the same title.[2] In 1980, no doubt, plans were made for a third volume, intended to deal with the televised programs of dialogue between selected journalists and Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and whomever. But the collapse of the original best laid plans of the League of Women Voters in 1980, even more than the performances in 1960 and 1976, revealed to all that the so-called *great debates* are in fact based upon *great myths*. In any report on what took place in 1980 (and especially when addressed to readers of a forensic society journal) it seems appropriate at the outset to explore four of the myths that shroud the subject.

The first myth is that the presidential debates were debates at all, great or small. In the American political tradition, in judicial procedure, and in collegiate forensics, debate has five essential elements. Debate is (1) a confrontation, (2) in equal and adequate time, (3) of matched contestants, (4) on a stated proposition, (5) to gain an audience decision. The "presidential debates" of 1960 and 1976 had little resemblance to that tradition,[3] and a quick review of 1980 reveals common shortcomings in their formats.

(1) Except in the sense that both debaters were on the same platform at the same time, there was no direct *confrontation*. At best, the prefaces to three of Reagan's responses showed that he had listened to Carter: "That is a misstatement of course, of my position." "Well, that just isn't true." "There you go again."[4] The only real confrontation was between candidate and journalist questioner, slightly abrasive when syndicated columnist Daniel Greenberg instructed Reagan and Anderson that "the panel and audience would appreciate responsiveness to the questions rather than repetitions of your campaign addresses," and a little reprimanding when ABC's Barbara Walters pronounced that "neither candidate answered specifically the question of a specific policy . . . ." In any case, students of debate will recall that it was Lincoln who posed the questions to Douglas at Freeport, and not some itinerant journalist.

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[1] Sidney Kraus, ed., *The Great Debates: Background—Perspective—Effects* [Kennedy-Nixon] (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962).

[2] Sidney Kraus, ed., *The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).

[3] See J. Jeffery Auer, "The Counterfeit Debates," in Kraus, *The Great Debates* (Kennedy-Nixon), pp. 142–50; and Lloyd Bitzer and Theodore Rueter, *Carter vs. Ford: The Counterfeit Debates of 1976* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), pp. 5–13.

[4] All references to the 1980 debates are to the complete texts of Reagan-Anderson, *New York Times*, 23 Sept. 1980, pp. 8–9, and Carter-Reagan, *New York Times*, 30 Oct. 1980, pp. 15–18.

(2) Moderators Bill Moyers and Howard K. Smith were careful timekeepers, and contesting candidates had *equal time*. But no thoughtful observer could describe as *adequate* the time given to candidates for dealing with questions. Reagan and Anderson each had two and a half minutes for their initial responses, and one minute and fifteen seconds for second responses. (This was no improvement over 1960: the comparable times for Nixon and Kennedy were three minutes and one minute.) It was hardly reasonable to think that within these constraints either man could deal adequately with "specifics" on how to attack inflation, meet energy shortages, or save the cities. Indeed, it is hazardous for public thinking to create the illusion that such problems can be "handled" in 225 seconds.

(3) In 1960 and 1976 it was easy to say that the debates involved *matched contestants*, but whether this was true in 1980 depended upon how you defined your terms. Certainly all three participants in the Baltimore and Cleveland events were men of some experience in the public discussion of political issues, but only one of them was privy to the information and insight that goes with the Oval Office, and only one of them had practiced being "presidential." Moreover, it should be noted that the two events did not match *all* contestants: to Baltimore came only two of the three who had been invited, and by the time of Cleveland one of these had been disinvited. From the beginning, of course, there were a couple of dozen other candidates selected by their parties, but clearly not acceptable for the debates. These included Barry Commoner of the Citizen's Party; Ed Clark, Libertarian; and David McReynolds, Socialist. McReynolds argued that the Socialist party was in a "Catch-22" situation: with less than five percent of the popular vote it could receive no federal funds; without funds it was denied access to television (and could not be invited by the League to share its "free" time); and without television it could never gain even a five percent following.[5] But it was John Anderson who protested most when, after having been invited to Baltimore, he was barred from Cleveland because he had dropped to less than the League's cut-off poll figure of fifteen percent. He called upon "the court of public opinion to express the outrage that I feel over being excluded."[6] His wife, Keke, proclaimed that "Roosevelt had the New Deal, Truman had the Fair Deal and John's gotten the raw deal."[7] But it was to no avail. Even though the recognized polling expert, Albert H. Cantril, argued that polls deal with probabilities and not with the kind of "objective" data that the League assumed,[8] Anderson lost his "viability" as a candidate and his qualifications for the debate.

(4) Of course there was an implicitly *stated proposition*: Resolved that this house favors candidate X for the presidency. Indeed, there was a second one implied in 1960, 1976, and 1980: that the ability to give facile and convincing answers to press conference questions demonstrates a candidate's qualifications to be president. Even forensic freaks would find it hard to prove that one. In fact, of course, there were no propositions for debate, but only questions for quick answers (hesitating before replying, perhaps even to think of something sensible to say, has always been considering a sign of weakness in these situations). The questions stood in isolation, unlinked to what went before, and with no logical progression.

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[5] *New York Times*, 4 Sept. 1980, p. E19.
[6] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 18 Oct. 1980, p. A3.
[7] *Bloomington Herald-Telephone*, 26 Oct. 1980, p. 3.
[8] *New York Times*, 7 Sept. 1980, p. E19.

Look for the unity, coherence and emphasis in this sequence of topics thrust at Carter and Reagan: military power, inflation, urban decline, hostages in Iran, arms limitation treaty, energy and oil, social security system, and perceived weaknesses of his opponent. The very format of the encounters randomized the subjects to be discussed, but beyond that, reported Soma Golden, editorial writer for the *New York Times*, when preparing to question Reagan and Anderson "I felt under enormous pressure to try framing a single question that would somehow catch the well-briefed candidates by surprise on a subject of importance."[9] Golden's question really turned into a discourse of 124 words, fewer than the record of a 153-word question by *Newsweek*'s Jane Bryant Quinn; but even the shortest question that night, by Lee May, *Los Angeles Times* reporter, was 72 words. For the record, the format of the Carter-Reagan performance was improved by permitting follow-up questions, and all questions seemed sharper in concept, though still prolix.

(5) As was said of the 1960 and 1976 meetings, so in 1980: neither participant could *gain a decision* from his listeners upon thoughtful consideration of issues because the format itself encouraged instant reactions, not developed arguments. Particularly in 1980, moreover, each contestant demonstrated the "straight rebuttal" approach at its worst; the emphasis was negative, picking away at the opponent's record, questioning probity, and searching for fatal flaws in factual assertions, all the while doubtless hoping to provoke a blunder to rival Ford's 1976 declaration of Rumanian, Yugoslavian and Polish independence from the Soviet Union.

In identifying as a myth the notion that "presidential debates" in any way resemble debates in the American political tradition, one is not obliged to propose a return to the 19th century confrontations of Webster vs. Hayne or Lincoln vs. Douglas. Indeed, it could be argued, if space were available, that this would present a standard of excellence beyond the demonstrated capacity of more than two or three presidential candidates in the 20th century. What is urged is that in the process of looking at the 1980 "presidential debates" as debates there were obvious weaknesses and constraints in their non-debate format.

The second myth is that the presidential debates evolved from the desire of the candidates to inform the electorate about critical political issues. If this myth can be traced to one man, he is Richard Nixon. Writing in 1961 about his debates with Kennedy in 1960, Nixon concluded that "joint TV appearances of candidates at the presidential level are here to stay, mainly because people want them and the candidates have a responsibility to inform the public on their views before the widest possible audience."[10] The myth was supported by Robert Sarnoff, in 1960 board chairman of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC): "'The Great Debate' [a term that apparently he coined] will become a lasting political institution that will reinforce the vigor of our country's democratic heritage in the chal-

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[9] *New York Times*, 24 Sept. 1980, pt. 4, p. 20.

[10] Richard M. Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), p. 357. With the perspective of the years, however, and writing after the Ford-Carter debates of 1976, Nixon granted that "I doubt that they can ever serve a responsible role in defining the issues of a presidential campaign. Because of the nature of the medium, there will inevitably be a greater premium on showmanship than on statesmanship." Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), p. 221.

lenging years ahead."[11] Frank Stanton, president in 1960 of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), saw the myth threatened by the argument that an incumbent president would never agree to debate, but concluded that it was irrelevant since the debates were not to serve "the interests of the candidates" but "the best interests of the voters." It would be "incredible cynicism" to think that "the people were entitled to see and hear candidates in face-to-face discussions only when it served the political interests of a candidate."[12] This view was made official by the blessing of Walter Lippmann who wrote in 1960 that "from now on it will be impossible for any candidate . . . to avoid this kind of confrontation with his opponent."[13]

Despite the failure to hold debates in 1964, and before the Nixon victory elections in 1968 and 1972, the myth was not substantially weakened. After all, innocents asked, was not the villain a Congress that refused to make them possible by repealing or waiving Section 315 of the Communication Act that effectively barred debates limited to two candidates? By 1976 a way had been found to make Section 315 action unnecessary, provided that a private agency sponsored the debates and the networks covered them as "news events." Thus the League of Women Voters came to sponsor and finance Ford and Carter in debate as its major effort to direct national focus upon "Issues not Images in Election '76."[14] While Sander Vanocur called the result "an unnatural act between two consenting adults in public,"[15] the League president's only worries were expressed in an article entitled "Will Success Spoil the League of Women Voters?"[16] And the myth went on.

The carefully structured myth came unstuck when Carter declined to participate in the debate arranged by the League of Women Voters for Baltimore on September 21. Reagan contributed his own classic of political piety in response: "The new Jimmy Carter would rather campaign in the safety and isolation of the Rose Garden instead of submitting himself and his sorry record to the examination of the other candidates and the scrutiny of the American people. I am sorry and I am angry and the American people also will be."[17] Anderson, whose hope for a legitimized candidacy rested heavily upon a joint appearance with the president, appeared naive when he told a press conference on September 9 that he couldn't believe Carter had made his own decision, that it must have been the advice of his campaign advisers "who are looking at this as a purely political thing."[18] Honest Robert Strauss, Carter's campaign chairman, acknowledged that whether to debate or not to debate was a bold political decision: "We have our selfish reasons. Reagan has his selfish interests," he said on the NBC "Today" show. "We all have our selfish interests. Let's don't kid

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[11] In a speech to the San Francisco Advertising Club, Oct. 5, 1960, quoted in Kraus, *The Great Debates* (Kennedy-Nixon), p. 64.

[12] In a speech to Sigma Delta Chi, New York, Dec. 3, 1960, quoted in Kraus, *The Great Debates* (Kennedy-Nixon), p. 71.

[13] *New York Herald Tribune*, 29 Sept. 1960, p. 26.

[14] "The '76 Presidential Debates," *The National Voter* (League of Women Voters), Fall 1976, p. 1.

[15] On a Public Broadcasting System (PBS) broadcast following the third Ford-Carter debate, Oct. 22, 1976.

[16] *The National Voter* (League of Women Voters), Fall 1976, p. 6

[17] *New York Times*, 11 Sept. 1980, p. 1.

[18] *Bloomington* (Indiana) *Herald-Telephone*, 11 Sept. 1980, p. 3.

ourselves." Reagan wanted Anderson in the debate, Strauss argued, because Anderson would draw as many as six votes from Carter for every one he took from Reagan.[19]

An equal amount of self-interest lay behind Reagan's repeated charge that Carter was afraid to debate and was making excuses for not debating.[20] Members of his staff were candid about the basis for their own views on debating, summed up by one who referred to a Carter-Reagan debate as "one big crapshoot that could blow it all," and warned newsman Hedrick Smith, "Don't expect to see us in a debate unless the polls change and the race gets too close for comfort."[21] One Carter aide had said earlier about the whole debate issue, "It's turned into gamesmanship—who's going to blink first,"[22] and on October 17 Reagan shifted strategy and agreed to a broadcast with Carter alone. It was a victory for the hawks in the Reagan camp who had long felt that "if the guy can't debate Jimmy Carter for one hour, maybe we're all making a mistake."[23] When the Reagan campaign showed need of rejuvenation, noted competent observers, it was time to try for "a big roll of the dice."[24]

The League of Women Voters clung to its ideals: "[we] did not attempt to sponsor a series of 1980 Presidential Debates in order to please the candidates, win the approval of political commentators or amuse the video junkies. Our purpose was, pure and simple, to serve the American public."[25] But the purpose of Carter, Reagan and Anderson was to serve their own political ends.

The third myth is that presidential debates have made critical changes in voter decisions upon the issues. Even though the governing term here is "critical changes," it is difficult to find an objective assessment of debate impact upon voting behavior. The candidates always tend to be generous in self-appraisal, especially when they win the election. Kennedy said, "it was TV more than anything else that turned the tide"; and Carter in 1976 acknowledged that "I have a feeling that, had it not been for the debates, I would have lost."[26] The voters themselves tend to judge by seeing how well their prior opinions held up, and thus their innate resistance to change is a filtering factor. Media critics concern themselves primarily with "who won?" and cover the events in the idiom of the newspaper sports page. Communication scholars are more concerned with the dynamics of the situation and with measurable attitude shifts, although in 1960 thirteen out of thirty-one such studies also included a "who won?" dimension.[27]

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[19] *Bloomington* (Indiana) *Herald-Telephone*, 10 Sept. 1980, p. 1; and *New York Times*, 9 Sept. 1980, p. 8.

[20] *New York Times*, 12 Sept. 1980, p. 8.

[21] *New York Times*, 19 Oct. 1980, p. 1E.

[22] *New York Times*, 9 Sept. 1980, p. 8.

[23] *New York Times*, 23 Sept. 1980, p. 6.

[24] Hedrick Smith, "Reagan . . . Agrees to Debate Carter Alone," *New York Times*, 18 Oct. 1980, p. 1; and Jack Nelson (of the *Los Angeles Times*), "Reagan Agrees to Meet Carter in Crucial Debate," reprinted in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 18 Oct. 1980, pp. A2, A18.

[25] Ruth J. Hinerfeld, "The 1980 Presidential Debates: Setting the Record Straight," *The National Voter* (League of Women Voters), Fall 1980, p. 1.

[26] Kennedy quoted in Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1960* (New York: Atheneum, 1961), p. 294; and Carter quoted in the *New York Times*, 7 Nov. 1976, p. 38.

[27] Elihu Katz and Jacob J. Feldman, "The Debates in the Light of Research: A Survey of Surveys," in Kraus, *The Great Debates* (Kennedy-Nixon), pp. 178–183.

These academic critics are agreed, however, on what happens to issues. In 1960 "the debates seem to have (a) made some issues salient rather than others (the issues made salient, of course, may or may not have been the most "important" ones); (b) caused some people to learn where the candidates stand (including the stand of the opposition candidate); (c) effected very few changes of opinion on the issues; and (d) focused more on presentation and personality than on issues."[28] A summary of scholarly assessments in 1976 indicated that it was less of an image-based election, and that "the Ford-Carter debates produced very little evidence of image enhancement . . . . A voter's perception of a candidate as a 'good guy' seems to be determined heavily by which side of the issue the candidate is on." On the other hand, "more than half the press coverage was *about* the debates, but not *of* the debates themselves."[29] Thus the issues of the debates were downplayed and the images of the candidates as performers were emphasized.

The Carter-Reagan debate offered little support for the myth of issue centrality. This is a conclusion made, of course, without benefit of the kinds of empirical studies done in the 1960 and 1976 debates, but it is assumed that when they come they will be in agreement. The conclusion is based, in part, upon an analysis of post-debate commentaries by more than fifty political observers, journalists, debate coaches, and rhetorical critics, as reported in the press during the week after the debate. Only a handful of these analysts referred to issues, and then to matters on which Carter challenged Reagan's position, Reagan responded that he was being misrepresented, and the matter was then dropped. There was a tendency on the part of a few to call "issues" matters that were really image-bound and reflected candidate posture rather than principle. The first of these was the continued effort by Carter to create an image of Reagan as "dangerous" on matters of war and peace. The second was Reagan's effort to create contrasting images to show the failure of Carter's economic policies: "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" The way the great majority of these critics saw the debate was reflected in their pervasive comments on these questions: Who seemed most presidential? Who had the best grasp of the facts? Who appeared to be most fallible? Who had the best stage presence? Did either one commit a gaffe? Did Reagan look "dangerous?" Did Carter seem credible?

A panel of seven directors of forensics, polled by the Associated Press on a 1–5 point ballot for each of six debating criteria, came out with a total of 161 points for Reagan, 160 for Carter.[30] This result paralleled the finding in an Associated Press public opinion poll completed within eighty minutes after the debate: twelve percent of the pre-debate undecideds split six and six for the candidates after the debate, leaving another twelve still undecided.[31] These two judgments of the debate seem reasonable in re-

[28] Katz and Feldman, "The Debates in the Light of Research," p. 203.

[29] Steven H. Chaffee and Jack Davis, "Presidential Debates: An Empirical Assessment," in Austin Ranney, ed., *The Past and Future of Presidential Debates* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), pp. 78, 84–85. Also see David O. Sears and Steven H. Chaffee, "Uses and Effects of the 1976 Debates: An Overview of Empirical Studies," in Kraus, *The Great Debates* (Carter-Ford), pp. 223–61.

[30] *Indianapolis News*, 29 Oct. 1980, p. 17.

[31] *Indianapolis Star*, 30 Oct. 1980, p. 1.

flecting a near standoff. But in that case Reagan was really the winner simply because he survived the debate. As Anthony Lewis put it, "Reagan always stood to gain from a debate with the President if he just stayed in the ring. He did that, avoiding any major slip, and those inclined to vote for him were no doubt reassured."[32] What reassured them, to keep the pugilistic figure, was the impression he gave of being able to stand up to his opponent. He was the classic defensive boxer, maintaining his cool and sticking to his basic fight plan. In short, his image was that of a candidate playing the role of a deliberately genial and smoothly competent challenger, adroitly fending off or evading his opponent's grim-faced attacks, and counter-punching just often enough to satisfy his fans.

Jimmy Carter had said that the question was who would make the best president. "It's not a contest to see who's the best debater or the best orator or the most professional television performer."[33] But it turned out that it was just that kind of a contest; and this meant that it was one in which the image of best debater/orator/performer was more important than any issue.

As questionable as these three myths are, it may seem surprising that they have sustained "presidential debates" in three campaigns. But these myths, in turn, have depended for much of their vitality upon still one more myth.

The fourth myth is that presidential candidates will someday voluntarily and regularly participate in real debates. We have already argued that in three campaigns the absence of traditional forensic elements made the "presidential debates" less effective than they might have been, that candidates took part even in these limited-format affairs only when it seemed to be politically expedient, and that the effect was more to create images than to illuminate issues. But despite this, those who believe in the tooth fairy will also find it possible to believe that one day all presidential candidates will voluntarily and regularly, and cheerfully, take part in real presidential debates.

The sequence of events relating to debates in the 1980 campaign belies this optimistic conclusion. First, Reagan believed that he was running ahead of his Republican opponents, and refused to debate them in Iowa before the primary. Second, Carter though he was ahead in the polls, refused to debate Teddy Kennedy in the Democratic primaries, even when Kennedy offered to withdraw from the race no matter how the debate turned out. Third, Carter refused to debate with Reagan and Anderson, despite having made what the League of Women Voters regarded as a "no-strings-attached promise," unless he could first debate Reagan "head-to-head." Fourth, Reagan declined to take part in a debate with Carter and without Anderson, believing that Anderson would help him and hurt Carter, but he did debate Anderson without Carter. Fifth, on October 14, with Carter gaining ground in the polls and Reagan stagnating, Carter's strategists, according to Jody Powell's later report, felt that "a debate could only hurt us," and devised a strategy to ensure Reagan's refusal to debate: an ultimatum that unless Reagan agreed to debate Carter alone by the end of that week, there would be no debate.[34] Sixth, before that ultimatum could be delivered, the League reversed itself on Anderson, declared that he was

[32] *New York Times*, 30 Oct. 1980, p. 29. James Baker, Reagan's debate negotiator, had said, "We don't have to win. We don't have to tie. A close loss is a plus for us because people expect more of the president." *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 28 Oct. 1980, p. A3.

[33] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 18 Oct. 1980, p. A1.

"not a viable candidate," and invited Carter and Reagan to debate alone. Reagan at once accepted and Carter had no politically defensible choice but to agree to what he had all along said he wanted. Finally, Anderson called "foul" at being left out; but there is no evidence that he ever responded to a similar request from Ed Clark, Libertarian candidate, for an Anderson-Clark debate. In short, the 1980 story revealed candidates who were willing to debate only if they were not ahead in the polls, or were ahead but losing momentum, and needed a lift for their campaigns.

The conclusion to be drawn from this account, as the League of Women Voters should be the first to testify, is that high ideals, well-laid plans, candidate promises, and a rallying of public opinion are not enough to explode this myth. The only way to ensure debates of any sort between presidential candidates in 1984 and after is to find a way to mandate them. Whether Americans really want to command presidential aspirants to debate or engage in other televised forensic competition is another question, but it is one that should be examined carefully by everyone who is concerned about the nature of politics and the quality of candidates.

Those who are interested in forgetting the myths and getting on with making presidential debates a reality already have a series of useful analyses and proposals to examine.[35] They range from suggestions for simple supplication to withholding federal presidential campaign funds from those who do not debate. They also deal with such details as possible formats, focus on issues, audience, the role—if any—for a panel of questioners, and general management of a sequence of forensic events, perhaps including formal debates, long interviews, press conferences, and citizen interrogations.

Members of Delta Sigma Rho–Tau Kappa Alpha and all those who have had first-hand opportunities to observe the efficacy of debate as a tool of a democratic society should take the lead in exploring ways and means of discarding the myths and making presidential debates a reality in future campaigns.

Postscript: After this article was set into type the League of Women Voters (LWV) announced (in *The National Voter*, Winter 1981, pp. 6–9) that it will seek, through a series of public hearings over the next two years, "the broadest possible input of ideas and viewpoints" about "improving and institutionalizing presidential debates as a tool in the election system." Readers of this journal possess an unusual understanding of the purposes and processes of debate and it should certainly be made available to the LWV. They should contact the presidents of local and state Leagues to see when and where the public hearings are to be held and how they can be among those called to testify.—J. J. A.

[34] *New York Times*, 9 Nov. 1980, p. 14.

[35] See George F. Bishop, Robert G. Meadow and Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, eds., *The Presidential Debates: Media, Electoral and Policy Perspectives* (New York, Praeger, 1978); Lloyd Bitzer and Theodore Rueter, *Carter vs. Ford*; Government Printing Office, *The Presidential Campaign, 1976, Vol. 3: The Debates* (Washington: 1979); Kraus *The Great Debates* (Kennedy-Nixon); Kraus, *The Great Debates* (Carter-Ford); Newton N. Minow, John Bartlow Martin and Lee M. Mitchell, *Presidential Television* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Ranney, *Past and Future*; Twentieth Century Fund, *With the Nation Watching: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Televised Presidential Debates* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1979).

THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES IN THEIR POLITICAL CONTEXT: THE ISSUE-IMAGE INTERFACE IN THE 1980 CAMPAIGN

ROBERT O. WEISS

The study of political campaign communication has been dominated, almost bewitched, by the dialectic of *issue* and *image*, a bewitchment which is reflected in journalistic essays, in a great body of formal research, and even in this symposium.

The concepts of issue and image frequently manifest themselves as polar extremities. On the one hand we are given the quintessential image candidate, character and personality undiluted by any particular issue position; on the other hand we find the disembodied issue candidate, a series of position papers somehow given voice without character. Likewise, scholarly partisans become polarized, eagerly monitoring the latest flurry of studies from outlying academic precincts projecting now issues, now images, as the principal determinants of voter behavior.[1]

In any event, our aim here is to utilize these presumably antithetical terms in investigating the recently concluded 1980 Presidential campaign and especially the highlight of the campaign, the presidential debates. To do this, we will extend our examination to incorporate something everybody actually realizes—that issues and images are in practical fact interlocked and that they intertwine in all manner of convolutions and mutually affect one another in countless ways. The alliterative label we will affix to this relationship is the "issue-image interface."

This analysis will look at the issue-image interface as it manifests itself in the discourse of the candidates. A rationale for studying the candidates' images by means of an examination of speech texts (rather than, say, public opinion polls) is provided by Thomas D. Clark.[2] The campaign and debate discourse will be made to reveal some of the ways in which issue and image elements served one another for the major candidates.

The primary phenomena we will examine are the image implications of issue controversies. Briefly we will also consider possible issue implications of image controversies as well as the issue-image implications of certain rhetorical substructures. We will conclude with specific treatment of the Carter-Reagan television debate.[3]

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[1] For summaries of research on candidate images versus political issues as influences in elections, see Dan Nimmo, *Political Communication and Public Opinion in America* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 380–82; Dan Nimmo and Robert L. Savage, *Candidates and Their Images: Concepts, Methods, and Findings* (Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 188–91; and Dan Nimmo, "Political Image Makers and the Mass Media," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 427 (Sept. 1976), pp. 33–44.

[2] Thomas D. Clark, "An Exploration of Generic Aspects of Contemporary American Campaign Orations," *Central States Speech Journal*, 30 (1979), 122–33.

[3] For studies of how previous presidential debates have influenced candidate images and campaign issues, see Jack Dennis, Steven H. Chaffee, and Sun Yuel

The Reagan-Carter "Warm-Up Debate" on Foreign Policy: Image Implications of Issue Controversies

Whether or not a candidate deliberately uses an issue as a "vehicle" for conveying an image, once he is drawn into an issue dispute he generates substantial reverberations among the traits composing the image he has established. These reverberations or effects may be seen as (a) being contained in the implied warrants and (b) being directly associated, explicit self-references in the speech.

For purposes of analysis we will take a fortuitous "warm-up" debate of sorts which developed because both Governor Reagan and President Carter chose to present nationwide paid political broadcasts on the issue of foreign policy Sunday, October 19. Reagan's was a 30-minute televised address and Carter's a 15-minute radio talk.

We refer to Reagan first. As an "issues" speech, Reagan's address rested upon key contentions that "we must build peace upon strength" and that "our economic, military and strategic strength under President Carter is eroding."[4] These contentions were supported with a nine-step program designed to "put America on a secure footing in the international arena." The ninth step, designated as "perhaps the most important of all," was to "restore the margin of safety for peace in our defense program." The warrant was simply that a margin of safety, an apparent superiority, is the guarantor of peace, a position which implies a personality or image component as well as a rationale for the person making it, a "king on the mountain" premise that stability is maintained by being "number one."

In spite of relatively moderate language and a modification of prior positions, Reagan's discourse reflected a person who was committed to a belligerent and superior position as a necessary personality trait. In order to maintain integrity on the foreign policy issue, Reagan was fundamentally unable in this address to modify the image of belligerence. If anything, it was reinforced. By Wednesday of the following week, both NBC News and CBS News reported the abandonment of the foreign policy area by Reagan to emphasize other matters.

The image-producing capacity of an issue-oriented message is established not only by the warrants supporting the basic claims, but also by the more direct and personal references placed into immediate association with them. The very opening remark of Reagan's television address in this instance was the ingenuous passage, "I'd like to speak to you now, not as a candidate for the Presidency, but as a citizen, a parent, in fact, a grand-

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Choe, "Impact on Partisan, Image, and Issue Voting," *The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976*, ed. Sidney Kraus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 314–30; Herbert W. Simons and Kenneth Leibowitz, "Shifts in Candidate Images," *The Great Debates* (Carter vs. Ford), pp. 398–404; Percey H. Tannenbaum, Bradley S. Greenberg, and Fred R. Silverman, "Candidate Images," in *The Great Debates: Background-Perspective-Effects*, ed. Sidney Kraus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 271–88; Lee B. Becker, Idown A. Sobowale, Robin E. Cobbey, and Chaim H. Eyal, "Debates' Effects on Voters' Understanding of Candidates and Issues," *The Presidential Debates: Media, Electoral, and Policy Perspectives*, eds. George F. Bishop, Robert G. Meadow, and Marilyn Jackson-Beeck (New York: Praeger, 1978), pp. 126–39; and Dan Nimmo, Michael Mansfield, and James Curry, "Persistance of Change in Candidate Images," *The Presidential Debates*, pp. 140–56.

[4] This and other passages from Reagan's televised speech (unless otherwise noted) are from the *New York Times*, 20 Oct. 1980, p. D10.

parent, who shares with you the deep and abiding hope for peace." The role of "parent, in fact, a grandparent" served the purpose of reinforcing the associated traits of judgment, maturity, nurturing and caring.

Even the core passage in which Reagan's opposition to SALT II was apparently tempered by an acceptance of SALT III was personalized: "I have repeatedly said in this campaign that I will sit down with the Soviet Union for as long as it takes to negotiate . . . ." Reagan professed patience both with the listener who may have missed that repetition and with the Soviets as well. Role identification and trait dramatization constitute two of the methods of associating personal traits with issues even in messages in which the issues are the presumable central concern.

President Carter, in his 15-minute foreign policy radio address the same Sunday, centered on the contention that the SALT II Treaty "strengthens our strategic position."[5] The primary supporting idea was that this treaty represents the "extremely important process . . . of gradually reducing the possibility of nuclear war." Throughout the argument the listener found an emphasis on process, on gradual change, the steps taken in "the last 20 years," the seven years of negotiation and instances of diplomatic success. Carter announced with approval: "We've rejected the counsels of pessimism and have dared to make progress toward peace." The image of the patient negotiator is embedded in the discourse, reinforced with an attempt to contrast this position with the more precipitous "nuclear arms race." Carter's image as a patient negotiator was somewhat tarnished in this address by the constraints of issue development when his description of the "steady building of our defenses" painted a vision of Soviet intentions and capacities which was, if anything, more threatening than the one presented by Reagan. The negotiator was just a little paranoid himself.

The incorporation of personal references in association with the issues, the second method for developing (or contradicting) an image in an issue speech, also was apparent in the Carter speech, most notably in his contrast between the spirit of negotiation and the aspiration to nuclear superiority: "I've had four years of sobering experience in this life-and-death field and in my considered judgment this would be a very risky gamble." The possibility of nuclear war, he said, "as president is something that I think about every day and every night of my life."[6] The theme of presidential shepherding appeared again in the self-references which (in conjunction with issue support) served to reinforce the character trait of the "stable leader" which pervaded this discourse.

The Campaign Context of the Reagan-Carter TV Debate: Issue Implications of Image Controversies

If we examine the issue-image interface from the other direction, we find that controversies which appear to focus on image elements directly will also contain issue components which are difficult to separate from them. We observe, for instance, the "role reversal" flap which came to a head in early October, when Carter (who had been trying to make Reagan appear harsh) began himself to acquire a "mean streak" label.

Carter was apparently making an effort to exhibit stronger and more

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[5] This and other passages from Carter's radio speech (unless otherwise noted) are from the *New York Times*, 20 Oct. 1980, p. D10.

[6] *Baltimore Sun*(e.); *Putnam County* (Indiana) *Banner-Graphic*, 20 Oct. 1980, p. A2.

aggressive personality traits in carrying the fight to the opposition, a tactic which led to the well-publicized statement in Chicago on October 6 that if he lost the election, "Americans might be separated, black from white, Jew from Christian, North from South, rural from urban," and "our adversaries be tempted to end the peace for which we all pray."[7]

One cannot make a strong statement without being strong about something; the sociological overtones of the issues of racism, the Moral Majority, and of the threat of war seemed well-suited to reinforce the nature of the attack, but unfortunately they suggested that Carter possessed the trait of "meanness" as well.

Reagan's choice was to express muted feelings: "I can't be angry. I'm saddened . . . . I'm not asking for an apology from him. I know who I have to account to for my actions. But I think he owes the country an apology."[8] After that, Carter felt constrained to be penitent, granted Barbara Walters an interview, and admitted, "The tone of the campaign has departed from the way it ought to be . . . . I'll try to make sure that it is better in the future."[9]

The effect, not necessarily permanent, was to deflect the issues associated with the original contentions, to defuse these issues, not only by taking attention away from them, but by intermixing the personal traits of the candidates with them along the issue-image interface. Thus, a complex issue-image interface became the context for the major event of the 1980 campaign—the Reagan-Carter debate.

The Carter-Reagan TV Debate

Having noted the operation of the issue-image interface earlier in the campaign, we turn to an analysis of the climactic debate in Cleveland on October 28th. It looked familiar. In the responses to the first question (the one concerning war and peace), for instance, the interchange followed closely the dynamics of the October 19th speeches—in more than one instance word for word. The only change worth noting, and it may have been substantial, was in the further modification of Reagan's issue position to establish more consonance with the "kindly grandfather"element of his image.

A fresher exchange was generated from William Hilliard's line of questioning concerning the plight of the inner cities and the future of an interracial society. If we designate this as an issue-oriented controversy, we observed Reagan advocating a particularized solution—the development zone—with the Presidency as a "bully pulpit" for encouraging racial harmony.[10] No speaker can make substantive contentions without introducing warrants which reflect personality traits. In this case, they almost suggest the traits of a genial bystander.

Carter's responses to the same question, set forth in the language of "we instituted" and "we plan," implied participation in a tradition of action and an agent role in the attack on the problem. To some extent this suggested character traits which contradicted those which emerged from analysis of the remarks on the foreign policy question. With the aphoristic

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[7] *New York Times*, 8 Oct. 1980, p. A27.
[8] *Time* (Oct. 20, 1980), p. 6.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] Quotations taken from a tape recording of the debate, October 28, 1980.

comment that "We are a nation of immigrants," Carter implied a unifying identity with minorities and refugees.

The responses to this question, as others, were replete with associated self-references—in this case especially from Reagan. When he remarked, "I have been talking to a number of Congressmen," "I stood in the South Bronx," "As governor, when I . . . ," and "I sat with a group of teenagers who were black," Reagan seemed to be suggesting the traits of one who seeks and digests information. Carter made fewer self-references in answering Hilliard's question and the bulk of his self-references were less overtly image-producing than were Reagan's. (It was later in the debate that he loosed the ultimate line of the "I've been talking to" genre: "I had a discussion with my daughter, Amy.") These passages illustrate both a reinforcing and a softening function of self-references in the issue-image interface.

Now to turn briefly to an exchange in the Cleveland debate which had a bearing on the issue implications of an image controversy. Barbara Walters' final and most obnoxious question asked each candidate why people should not vote for the other candidate—a question which quite explicitly called for image controversy. The wording required that they attack one another's images. Indeed, Carter did refer to Reagan's "belligerent attitude" and Reagan called attention to "promises not kept," but essentially both candidates metamorphized the question into an account of their own stronger traits. They did this largely by utilizing issues. Carter began with "war and peace"; Reagan followed with the domestic situation. Carter introduced the Equal Rights Amendment and Reagan responded. It was only in the final rejoinders of this interchange that the direct self-references of "Howard, I'm a Southerner" (Carter) and "I'm the only fellow who was six times president of his own union" (Reagan) were brought into play. Even these comments tended to reinforce issues which the candidates believed to be important.

In this debate, as in earlier campaign discourse, there was an interlocking of issue and image elements, serving both to reinforce and to contradict one another and establishing themselves through implied warrants as well as through directly associated self-references.

Evidence, Issues and Image: The Reagan-Anderson TV Debate

Although this essay has been primarily concerned with the image-issue interface as illustrated by Reagan and Carter, the Reagan-Anderson debate in September merits examination as an instance of how the data (as well as the warrant) of an argument affect issues and images. The use of documented evidence to support one's position, of course, would appear to be the essence of issue debating. But it also has important implications for a candidate's image. Anderson, for example, conspicuously made citations to reports and studies: "When you have a report, as we did recently . . . ."; "I have seen figures to indicate . . . ."; "Recently I saw a Princeton University study . . . ."; and "the Harvard Business School study indicated . . . ."[11] In using such evidence Anderson managed to support his arguments and to establish himself as a student as well—with the additional

[11] *New York Times*, 23 Sept. 1980, pp. B10 and B11.

implication that his opponent based his arguments on less sound documentation or none at all.

That there are some dangers for one's image in utilizing such reports emerged from the colorful repartee which resulted when Anderson contended that the "Senate Budget Committee report does not accommodate all of the Reagan defense plans," and Reagan dismissed the contention with the quip that "some people look up figures and some people make up figures." The context of the exchange was manifestly one of image as much as issue, as was suggested by the incorporation in the same passage by Reagan of the assertion that John has "never held an executive position of that kind" and "I think being Governor of California is probably the closest thing to the Presidency . . . of any executive job in America today."[12] Evidential support, normally associated with issue controversy, without doubt intrudes upon image formation as well.

The Interface

In sum, the issue-image interface—a locale for all appeals partaking of both elements—appears to constitute a fertile ground for exploration of political discourse, especially televised political debates in which candidates project their images and issues on the same screen at the same time. While we have not here attempted to define discrete synthetic rhetorical units, we have indicated some of the ways in which issues and images are mutually dependent and have set forth some of the implications which these have suggested.

In the 1980 presidential debates—and, indeed, in the entire campaign—Carter, Reagan and Anderson all appeared to have certain difficulties in managing their discourse to accommodate both issues and images. This was a campaign in which direct appeals to the electorate evidently made a difference, where attitudes and votes were indeed changed. The dialectical tensions within the issue-image interface were perhaps signs (and possibly even causes) of the difficult and perplexing time the voter was having in the struggle toward an appropriate decision.

[12] *Ibid.*

YOU CANNOT NOT DEBATE: THE DEBATE OVER THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

ROBERT L. SCOTT

Several years ago I complained about what has become an aphorism for many in the field of communication: you cannot not communicate.[1] The common use of that catch phrase struck me then and still strikes me as a poor interpretation of Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson,[2] and as highly deleterious to a serious study of the phenomena of communication.

My claim was, and is, that when one is in a communicative situation, that is, one in which two or more persons recognize one another as persons, then one cannot not communicate; but we are often alone and often with people in such circumstances that others-as-persons are not focal (but, of course, may become focal). Clearly, however, presidential campaigns are communicative situations—communicative situations of a rather special sort in which a candidate not only cannot not communicate, but cannot not debate. The purpose of this essay is both to develop this argument and to reveal that the debate about the 1980 presidential debates played a crucial and formative role in the perceptions of the Reagan-Carter televised debate of October 28, 1980.

Campaigning, not only but especially presidential campaigning, is such a situation that those running for office cannot not debate. If the situation determines the consequences, then we should be able to see those consequences in the residue of any past campaign for public office. If we studied enough campaigning through time, we might be put in the position of concluding (1) that my assertion is wrong, (2) that my assertion is correct for campaigning after a certain time but not before, or that (3) the residue from some campaigns do not permit adequate reconstruction.

Now, however, I am interested solely in the 1980 presidential campaign, and primarily in the debate about the debates. Even if the Reagan-Anderson encounter had not been televised, nor the Carter-Reagan affair, there would have been a debate. Rather, there would have been many debates that we would finally come to see as one thing.

If we were able now to complete my imagined project of a comparative study of all campaigning, or more nearly practical, all presidential campaigning, I would predict that we could conclude that all important public communication is mediated. "The message" is always an amalgam of phenomena and the relationships that give us the sense of unity. Even in limited circumstances, "a message" is embedded in mediational processes. In the 1980 presidential campaign the instruments of mediation were without doubt myriad, but the role of the electronic mass media was paramount, and it is on that role that I shall concentrate.

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[1] "Communication as an Intentional, Social System," *Human Communication Research*, 3 (1977), 258–68.

[2] Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, and Don D. Jackson, *The Pragmatics of Human Communication* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), p. 49.

Although the "great debates" of 1960, 1976, and 1980 were broadcast on radio, it was television that gave them their flavor. Richard Nixon's five o'clock shadow became not only the fatal flaw for the commentators on the first of these twentieth century marvels, taking on epic proportions like Rustrum's sword breaking, but became a model: we have learned to expect that something seen will reveal which of the contestants has the mettle to win.

With debating carried into the 1980 campaign as a set of expectations from the past, makers of media events saw their business as usual in presenting what the public demanded. The circularity of reporting news and making news has been often commented on. This case is no different, but it may be sensible here to emphasize the propensity of the multitudinous press, especially the electronic medium, to cast their future roles while playing their present parts: reporting whether or not and if so under what conditions the candidates would debate.

The nominating conventions were scarcely over before the speculating began: who would have what sort of advantage under what sort of circumstances? The expectations of potential voters were whetted by the attributing of virtues and vices as verbal combatants to the nominees, and, of course, the challenge to make face-to-face confrontations involve more than two faces issued immediately.

Like the public at large, the various reporters played hunches, although they scarcely labeled their inclinations "hunches," and looked for opportunities to confirm them. To have the candidates debate, especially in circumstances in which the press would play an active role as questioners, would provide an opportunity to confirm hunches. Dramatized as they now are in media events, campaigns seem to be alive, actively seeking foci.

The debate about the debate in 1980 began early and lasted late. Soon the controversy seemed to fizzle, but it took on renewed life as the commentators pumped the polls not simply seeking information about how voters were feeling but constantly interpreting each in such ways as to create responses. In a stricter sense of "feedback" than we generally see in textbook discussions of the communicative process, the products (outputs) were fed back into the process as instructions (inputs) to enhance further production.

The debate between Carter and Reagan that finally resulted was determined in content and tone by the debate about the debate. The earlier debate between Reagan and Anderson was, too, but less decisively so.

Fundamentally, the debate about the debate turned on the value of *fairness*. The primary issue was: What will be fair? One answer was that all the major contestants would appear together—all, face-to-face. The other answer was that there should be a round-robin, a series of debates.

Some observers and some partisans claimed that Reagan simply did not want to debate and that the squabble about including Anderson just gave him a chance to duck Carter. The supposed advantage of the incumbency and Carter's prowess as a debater were repeated themes. *Time* magazine, in one of its weekly summaries of the campaign, quoted a "Ronald Reagan strategist" as saying, "Facts, numbers and the precision of his engineering mind will make Carter a formidable opponent. Carter is a master of detail. He is going to be very, very tough."[3] Underlying the *Time* treatment is the implication that to be fair one cannot duck a difficult encounter.

[3] *Time* (Sept. 8, 1980), p. 17.

But another theme was incipient at the beginning, subordinate to fairness: it is cowardly not to contest the issues with one's opponent face-to-face. Both fairness and courage became sharp points that wounded Carter deeply.

The positions were played out again and again, but each time the question beneath the arguments was fairness. Reagan, early on, took the position that Anderson ought to appear. His reason was not that Carter was reputed to be a strong debater against whom he needed help nor the distraction that a three-cornered affair might provide to offset his possible gaffes. His reason was that such a debate would be fair. Let all come face-to-face, at one time, in one place. What could be fairer? Of course he did not claim that Barry Commoner or Ed Clark should join the debate, and he did not need to in order to be consistent. The League of Women Voters shouldered the burden of drawing a line that seemed to include Anderson and exclude the others.

Carter, early on, took the position that any debate involving more than one of the challengers to the incumbent president would be unfair since each of the others would be contesting for the position he held, therefore, two-against-one and that would not be fair.

Later he began to sound shrill as he objected to the legitimacy of Anderson's claim to be included: "I think Anderson is primarily a creation of the press. He's never won a primary, even in his home state. He ran as a Republican, and he's still a Republican. He hasn't had a convention. He doesn't have a party. He and his wife picked his vice presidential nominee."[4]

This comment became the occasion for one of the sharper displays of disgust at Carter in Tom Wicker's *New York Times* column (titled "Carter's Empty Chair") in which Wicker called Carter "the first media president."[5] At nearly every turn, the President's attempt to justify not debating Anderson was pictured by the media as making claims to which he had no fair access.

At the debate between Anderson and Reagan it appeared for awhile as if an empty chair would actually be placed in view of the cameras. That the chair was not there during that hour scarcely prevented its becoming symbolic. The well publicized threat was avidly exploited. Cartoonist Oliphant's version featuring an empty high chair, with the little man in the corner saying, "He wants to be above it all," stressed the petulance widely attributed to Carter. The president was met at a campaign stop in Springfield, Illinois, with a sign lettered "Carter Is a Chicken." In short, the taunts were those of the playground, where being fair and displaying courage often are given negative expression in jeering at the child who seems unwilling to play unless he can specify the rules.

When debating itself is problematic, the fundamental issue may necessarily pivot on the concept of "fairness"; and that concept is probably always open to interpretation. The longer the candidates pursue the questions of whether or not to debate, when to debate, and how to debate, the more crucial the underlying value of fairness is likely to become.

Reagan's position on the debate about the debate was probably more easily understood than Carter's. Even more important, Carter seemed to be avoiding or seeking advantage to a much greater degree than did Reagan. Especially after Reagan and Anderson debated, Reagan's apparent concern for fairness eclipsed Carter's.

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[4] *Time* (Sept. 22, 1980), p. 8.
[5] *New York Times*, 12 Sept. 1980, p. A23.

All of these reinforcements became critical in the debate between Carter and Reagan. Not that the effect of polling needed emphasizing, but the apparent role that the changes in the margins on the various polls had in the final disposition to arrange a debate underscored not only the criticalness of the polls themselves but of Carter's seeking of an advantage. In the debate, Reagan's demeanor—his smile, cocking of his head, and repeated, "There you go again . . ."—served to cast Carter in the role of one who takes advantage. The dynamic of the debate about the debate served to insert the concept of fairness, i.e., one who takes *unfair* advantage.

I would argue, then, that Carter lost the election, as he himself later speculated, in the debate but that the impetus that made the contrast between himself and Reagan so dramatic was largely fixed in the debate about the debate.[6]

Closely woven into the fabric of the debate about the debate were perceptions of the characters of the principal actors: Carter and Reagan. Perhaps a perception of the character of the participants, or potential participants if we remain looking at the events preceding the final confrontation, will always be an important aspect of judging a debate.

In the 1980 campaign, the Carter strategy, clearly, was to try to contrast his probity with Reagan's insecure grasp both of relevant data and interpretive ability. The model, especially as the media dramatized it, was the way the incumbent President Johnson had characterized his opponent as Quick Draw Goldwater. As the nominating convention closed, Carter's pollster, Pat Caddell, found the bright side to Reagan's apparent lead; in fact, Caddell asserted that it would have been nice had Reagan's margin been even larger to emphasize Carter as the underdog and to make Reagan's suitability the easy target of the appeal to the voters' discrimination: "One thing I am much surprised by is the enormous doubt about Ronald Reagan." [7]

Unfortunately for Carter, the model and hence the strategy was all too apparent. Constantly the media pictured him, and his campaigners, as negative. The image of a negative President looking for, waiting impatiently for, preparing avidly for his opponent to look bad became difficult for Carter to deal with. Since in the minds of many, Carter was error prone, the irony was scarcely to be missed. In spite of Caddell's being pleased by the distrust of Reagan, some polls seemed to indicate that a strong anti-Carter sentiment was a more important constituent of the support for Reagan than was the anti-Reagan feeling in turning voters to Carter.[8]

When the debate finally arrived, pictured as it was as Carter's chance to capitalize on what the poll watchers dramatized as a shift away from Reagan, the President was left in an unenviable predicament: how to sling mud without being perceived as a mud-slinger. Undoubtedly neither the President nor his advisers would have put the matter in those words, but

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[6] Carter was not alone, of course, in fretting about the impact of the debate. Just two days before the election Pat Caddell telephoned reporter Elizabeth Drew to convey his erroneous belief that Carter had turned the election around: "We were getting killed on Thursday and Friday [after the debate]. Now a whole new election is taking place." Caddell went on to explain that the results of a new poll would be in later that day, which he hoped would confirm the trend, but "I just wish we hadn't debated." See Elizabeth Drew, "A Reporter at Large—1980: The Election," *The New Yorker* (Dec. 1, 1980), pp. 182–83.

[7] *Time* (Aug. 25, 1980), p. 11.

[8] See, e.g., *Time* (Sept. 15, 1980), p. 12.

again the dynamics of the debate about the debate had honed the potentialities and presented the accoutrements of the role as fitting.

The result was from the outset strange—even absurd. Carter, who had been touted all along as a powerful debater, quick with the facts held in astounding detail, ready to dazzle listeners and confuse an opponent, was stiff and ill at ease. His characteristic slowly paced speech seemed stiff and uncertain, rather than cool and concerned. Reagan, on the other hand, seemed to come determined not to debate at all, as he ignored the thrust of questions and concentrated on appearing calm and unflappable in the face of the renowned debater who was to be treated as determined to make painful, personal attacks. Whether or not Reagan's strategy was purposive, that demeanor was a neat foil to the Carter camp's insistence that any debate be held long enough before the election to correct misstatements or misrepresentations.[9] In short, it was simple enough to perceive Reagan as long-suffering: denied an early confrontation with Carter through his insistence on being fair to John Anderson and finally granted a face-to-face encounter only when and under conditions that seemed on the surface to favor Mr. Carter.

Although many academic commentators shrink from calling these affairs genuine debates, the quality of a verbal contest was there. The value of fairness, as strange as the guises in which it appeared, colored what potential voters saw. Many were apparently prepared to chide Carter for taking advantage and to sneer at his failure to do so effectively. His manifest lack of confidence gave the non-verbal stamp of the look of the loser that we have been taught to seek out. His attributing the spector of nuclear holocaust as the most serious issue to remarks of his daughter Amy seemed more than over reaching—it seemed desperate. What more dramatic contrast could Reagan's tacticians have asked for as their candidate played his role as cool, confident, and willing to take the worst from a determined fault finder?

In pushing hard to put Reagan on the defensive, Carter fulfilled the prophecy of the press. His efforts looked strategic because they had been so labeled well in advance for instant identification. Reagan's manner, much more than his actual replies, stamped him as a well prepared, cool adversary, perhaps fitting the role repeatedly polished by the commentators waiting for the debate: being presidential. Carter's very presence in the debate after standing aloof the first time, as well as his hard struggling, underscored beliefs like Tom Wicker's wicked depiction of his "hard won reputation for indecision, ineptitude and speed on the backtrack."[10]

Few audiences of political encounters have ever been so well instructed in how to respond. Professional football playoffs give us the model for contant analyzing of strengths, weaknesses, and predictions of probable

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[9] A good deal leads me to believe that Reagan's strategy was quite purposive. Myles Martel, in his essay elsewhere in this issue, details Reagan's rehearsal with Representative David Stockman playing Carter, as he had earlier played Anderson, familiarizing himself with the tactics expected. Martel claims that during that time Reagan himself came up with "there you go again," the only memorable phrase from the debate—and one readily understood because we were so thoroughly schooled to interpret Carter as attacking Reagan's record. The phrase was masterful, especially delivered as it was by Reagan. A person identified by *Newsweek* magazine as "one senior Carter strategist" was quite right: "Reagan's awfully good at putting on that hurt look" (Oct. 27, 1980, p. 37).

[10] *New York Times*, 12 Sept. 1980, p. A23.

strategies. The showdown between Carter and Reagan only lacked the incessant running commentary to fill out the model.

The debate between Carter and Reagan was a media event. The media, and especially television, were involved in such a way as to appear the brokers of yet another all encompassing contest. Yet when the debate finally came, it was less a Superbowl than something at least slightly more absurd—a familiar cast of characters pitted in conventional conflict but somehow unfittingly. Perhaps it was the 1980 political equivalent of what occupied many viewers later in the fall: the Battle of the NFL Cheerleaders.

In any case, the final debate must be seen as the culmination of, the denouement of the long debate about the debates.

DEBATE PREPARATIONS IN THE REAGAN CAMP: AN INSIDER'S VIEW

MYLES MARTEL

Of the hundreds of appearances made by Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter and John Anderson during the 1980 presidential campaign, none drew more public attention nor earned more significance than the two presidential debates. The debate between Reagan and Anderson on September 21 and the "Great Debate" between Reagan and Carter on October 28 occurred at critical points in the campaign. The first debate was a valued opportunity for Anderson to strengthen his candidacy and, ironically, for Reagan to strengthen his campaign as well, for many thought Anderson could draw more votes from Carter's support base than from Reagan's. The second debate, it was generally believed, could influence enough undecided voters to ultimately affect the election.

As a participant in and a witness to the enormously complex process of debate preparations in the Reagan camp, I shall highlight the strategy and tactics and the personalities and feelings behind these two historic events.

Formation of Reagan's Debate Task Force

Reagan's debate task force was formed in mid-August by James Baker, III, Gerald Ford's campaign manager in 1976 and George Bush's in 1980. A tough but amiable master organizer with impressive political acumen and negotiating skill, Baker convinced other senior Reagan advisors of the importance of forming a debate team composed primarily of people not intimately involved in the day-to-day management of the campaign. In that way, the task force could devote most of its energy to the debates.

Members of the task force, in addition to me, included Bill Carruthers, Frank Ursomarso, David Gergen and Frank Hodsoll. Carruthers, a top-notch Hollywood television producer who had served as Gerald Ford's media advisor in 1976 and who was serving in a similar capacity for Reagan, would take charge of technical preparations and would become one of Reagan's negotiators with the sponsor of both debates, the League of Women Voters. Ursomarso, an accomplished advance man for Ford and Nixon who had headed the advance operation for the 1976 presidential debates, would do the same for the 1980 debates. Gergen, a resident fellow of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research and managing editor of *Public Opinion*, would head up the preparation of Reagan's briefing materials. He had served as head of the White House Office of Communications under Ford and is highly regarded as a policy analyst and speechwriter. Hodsoll, a former State Department official (Deputy U.S. Representative for Nonproliferation of Nuclear Arms) and an excep-

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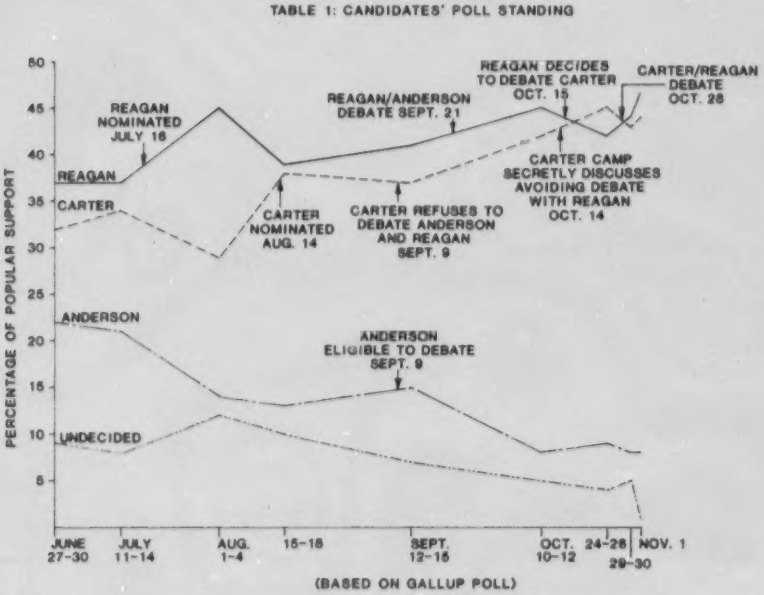
Table 1. Candidates' poll standing.



tional administrator with a well-disciplined legal mind, would manage the research and the administration of the debate preparations.

Reagan's top-echelon advisors would also reinforce considerably the efforts of the debate task force. These advisors included: Reagan's closest aide, Edward Meese; his campaign manager, William Casey; and his pollster and premier campaign strategist, Richard Wirthlin (with whom I would work closely).

Initially, our major responsibility was to prepare for a debate which might include Reagan, Carter and Anderson, but prospects for such a contest did not last long. Carter withdrew on September 9, the day the League deemed Anderson eligible to debate (Table 1). Clearly, Carter did not want to elevate Anderson's legitimacy as a candidate, especially since Anderson threatened to take many more votes from him than from Reagan. Although the public disapproved of Carter's decision by a 2–1 margin, he apparently reasoned that the negative publicity resulting from his refusal would be easier to shoulder than the risks associated with debating.[1] He insisted, however, that he would debate Reagan alone for the first debate, a proposition our camp never seriously contemplated. We wanted to capitalize on the Anderson factor and Reagan himself believed that as long as Anderson was viable, he did not want to be a party to excluding him.

[1] The Gallup Poll, Sept. 21, 1980. For additional information on polling data collected by the Reagan and Carter campaigns, see "Face Off: A Conversation with the Presidents' Pollsters Patrick Caddell and Richard Wirthlin," *Public Opinion*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (Dec. 1980–Jan. 1981), pp. 2–14.

Once Carter withdrew, we discussed whether or not Reagan should debate Anderson alone. At 4:30 p.m. on the day Anderson became eligible and Carter withdrew Carruthers asked me to transmit to the Reagan Headquarters within an hour a memo regarding the advisability of a Reagan-Anderson debate. He explained that it would be read at a 6:00 p.m. meeting called to discuss the issue. In my memo I argued that Reagan would gain little by debating, but that he could lose more by refusing, especially since he had spent the past month championing Anderson's participation in a three-way debate. I also noted that Reagan could "strike a pleasing contrast against Anderson who comes off as too intense and even cocksure."[2] The prospect that Reagan might make a gaffe during the debate—a concern which loomed large since he had made several within the past month—was a risk I felt we had to assume. Ducking the debate could perpetuate the "gaffe" image; performing well could stop it dead in its tracks. Late that night, following an exhaustive discussion of the issue, I was told that Reagan and Anderson would indeed debate.

With the debate only twelve days away, preparations intensified. The briefing team, aided by several volunteers from law firms, think tanks, and congressional staffs, collected, read, dissected and screened literally tens of thousands of pages on more than 100 issues ultimately covered in Reagan's briefing books. Baker, Carruthers, and Dean Burch (former FCC chairman and Goldwater's campaign manager in 1964) negotiated the format and planned the technical aspects of the debate. Baker sent out requests for strategy recommendations to politically astute Republicans and helped set up the debate practice sessions. Leslie Sorg, former Director of Communications for the National Federation of Republican Women, performed background research on the panelists suggested by the League and ultimately selected by them following recommendations from each candidate's camp.

Goals and Strategy for Baltimore

Reagan's goal for this debate was to perform "very respectably"—to present a "respectable" answer to each question, to remain presidential—against the man considered to be the House of Representatives' outstanding orator. As the strategy was developed, we expected Reagan to do well against Anderson. He had, we agreed, outperformed him during the New Hampshire and Illinois primary debates.[3]

Reagan's specific goals were to emphasize Carter's incompetent leadership and to project his own "reasonableness, moderation and sensitivi-

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[2] Memorandum, Myles Martel to James Baker, III, Sept. 9, 1980.

[3] See the *Washington Post*, 28 Feb. 1980, p. 1. According to Wirthlin's polling data, reported in this article, Reagan was named winner of the League's February 20, 1980 Manchester, New Hampshire Presidential Primary Forum by 33% of the voters surveyed. George Bush garnered 17%, John Anderson 14%, and Howard Baker 12%. Coverage of the League's Midwest Forum, held in Chicago on March 13, 1980, indicates that Anderson had difficulty selling himself as he drew heavy attacks from Reagan, Bush, and Philip Crane. See the *New York Times*, 14 March 1980, p. 16, and the *Philadelphia Bulletin*, 14 March 1980, p. B4. Reagan, upon hearing Anderson state in the Illinois forum that he would not automatically support the Republican Party's nominee, took command of the opportunity by dramatically turning to Anderson to ask: "John, you wouldn't really find Teddy Kennedy preferable to me, would you?"

ty," especially since a significant portion of the electorate believed he possessed the opposite traits. Toward this end our greatest hope strategically was for Anderson to attack Carter harder than Reagan. Such a scenario would allow Reagan to minimize defending his own positions, to pay less attention to Anderson's, and to focus on the salient negative aspects of Carter's record. In fact, several conversations with Reagan were aimed at developing a "pass through" strategy which would have him talking "through" Anderson to take on Carter's record.

Our concern regarding Anderson's intended strategy was heightened when a *Washington Post* article which appeared the week before the debate quoted Anderson as intending to focus the debate on Reagan to differentiate himself as much as possible from him. "If I attack Carter," Anderson reasoned, "I begin to look like a pale image of Ronald Reagan, and I'm not that, I'm not that."[4] Whether or not Anderson was merely posturing is unclear, for his anti-Reagan attacks were no more severe than those levelled at Carter.

Two related strategic issues also surfaced before the Baltimore debate. First, to what extent should Reagan stress Carter's absence? Second, how forceful should Reagan's anti-Carter attacks be? Our concern for a possible voter backlash prompted us to counsel Reagan not to overplay Carter's absence and to temper his anti-Carter attacks. The risk of overplaying Carter's absence was, however, effectively reduced when the League, apparently succumbing to Democratic pressure, reneged on its commitment to our and Anderson's negotiators to place a lectern in the center of the stage to symbolize Carter's absence.

Preparations for Baltimore

Our first meeting with Reagan was held on September 15 at Wexford, the sprawling and secluded Virginia estate he rented after his nomination. Led by Baker, the meeting familiarized Reagan with the planning behind the debate, including the recommended strategy (which I presented) and allowed Gergen and Hodsoll to explain the first set of briefing materials, a notebook of approximately 70 pages. When the meeting ended the task force members appeared confident that Reagan appreciated the importance of the debate and was willing to sacrifice three full days of campaigning to prepare for it.

On September 18, we began three days of intensive meetings with Reagan at his home. Originally, formal briefings were planned for each morning and practice question and answer sessions for the afternoons. However, we soon discovered that Reagan felt more comfortable and derived greater stimulation from the question and answer sessions critiqued by his advisors. As a result, we spent the afternoon of the first day and the entire preparation time of the next two days in his garage, a building Carruthers had converted into a professional quality television studio. The studio, a 20′ by 30′ carpeted room which would also be used for the Cleveland debate, was replete with 18 theatrical lights, 2 television cameras, 2 monitors, a lectern replicating the one to be used in Baltimore, two professional cameramen and a lighting expert.

The initial sessions involved questions posed to Reagan by major advisors and key aides acting as panelists. Participating in at least one session for either debate were economic and domestic policy advisors Martin An-

[4] *Washington Post*, 19 Sept. 1980, p. 9.

derson, Alan Greenspan, William Simon and Caspar Weinberger; foreign policy and military advisors Richard Allen, William Van Cleve and Stefan Halper; Senators Howard Baker (R., Tenn.) and John Tower (R., Tex.); Representatives Margaret Heckler (R., Mass.) and Richard Cheney (R., Wyo.) and Jeane Kirkpatrick, Leavy University Professor of Comparative Politics at Georgetown University and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. Following each question or round of questions, Reagan's responses were critiqued by panelists and other advisors, including myself, for accuracy, completeness, strategic and tactical soundness, and persuasiveness.

On September 19, two days before the Baltimore debate, John Anderson's stand-in arrived on the scene. David Stockman, a bright, gentlemanly, and articulate two-term Congressman from Michigan who had once served as John Anderson's administrative assistant, impressed all of us with a realistic portrayal of his former boss. The air of competition imposed by Stockman's role helped make Reagan's answers more pointed and his style more self-assured.

The Baltimore Format

In our judgment, the Baltimore format may have slightly favored Reagan (Table 2). We were especially pleased that our negotiators had secured a 60 rather than a 90 minute debate. The additional 30 minutes would have given Anderson more exposure, and would have increased the chances that our candidate might make a mistake or be caught uninformed on a relatively obscure issue. The provision for only six questions with only three being asked first of Reagan also reduced these risks. Furthermore, since each candidate received the same question, no question could be easily slanted for or against one candidate. Finally, repetition of the question by the panelists, an innovation, reduced the possibility of embarassing misinterpretation.

The "John" Tactic

One of the tactical highlights of the Baltimore debate was Reagan's reference to Anderson as "John." Although Reagan was counselled to do this after he briefly considered calling him "Congressman Anderson," he probably would have referred to him as "John" if no such advice were given. Reagan had, after all, called Anderson "John" during the Illinois primary debate. The effectiveness of the "John" tactic was attributable in large measure to Anderson's tendency to refer to Reagan as "Sir," "Governor Reagan" and "my opponent." Indeed, Reagan's calm, avuncular manner contrasted pleasingly with Anderson's more intense style.

A Little Noticed Foul in Baltimore

Whether or not debaters should take notes to their lecterns is often a thorny issue. While they might ordinarily prefer access to them, they also fear that using notes might project them as uninformed or that their opponent might use dramatically a damaging letter, newspaper article or other document. The use of notes, however, was not at issue during negotiations for either 1980 presidential debate. Emulating the agreement reached before the 1976 presidential debates, Reagan's, Anderson's, and Carter's negotiators readily agreed that no notes would be taken to the lectern, although candidates would be permitted to make notes during the debate.

Despite this agreement, Anderson took to his podium at least three file

Table 2. Reagan vs. Anderson, Baltimore Debate, September 21, 1980.

Each of the candidates was required to respond to the same question. A question round was formatted as follows:

Question #1: 30 seconds
Candidate A response: 2:30
Question #1 restated to candidate B: 30 seconds
Candidate B response: 2:30
Candidate A rejoinder: 1:15
Candidate B rejoinder: 1:15

The hour-length format allowed for six individual questions, i.e. each panel member asked only one question of the candidates.

There were no opening statements, with closing statements limited to three minutes per candidate.

folders which he frequently consulted off-camera while Reagan was speaking. In fact, he actually read most of his closing address. To compound matters, moderator Bill Moyers made no mention of the "no notes" provision in his opening remarks (despite our efforts for him to do so) and did not reprimand Anderson for using them.

To prevent this problem in Cleveland, our negotiators arranged for Reagan's and Carter's note pads to be color coded and for moderator Howard K. Smith to mention the "no notes" provision in his opening remarks.

What the Baltimore Debate Did for Reagan

For five principal reasons the Baltimore debate was a positive event for the Reagan campaign. Specifically, it: (1) projected Reagan as Presidential—as a reasonable, fair, intelligent human being; (2) conveyed the impression that his issue positions were responsible (as opposed to radical); (3) placed the "gaffe" image at a reasonably comfortable distance behind him; (4) reinforced Anderson's candidacy at least to a modest extent; and (5) portrayed Jimmy Carter negatively for refusing to debate.[5]

Hopes for a Reagan-Carter Debate Fall and Rise

For approximately three weeks following the Baltimore debate the likelihood of a Reagan-Carter debate diminished. This expectation was reinforced by our hope that Reagan would not have to debate Carter. While we had confidence in Reagan's debating skills, nurtured largely by his successful performance in six debates throughout the campaign and by his more telegenic image, we nevertheless regarded Carter as formidable. He had four years of on-the-job experience, a penchant for using specifics impressively and the ability to project a blend of earnestness, sincerity and piety which could compete with Reagan's more casual but nonetheless engaging manner.

By mid October the prospect of a Reagan-Carter debate resurfaced as John Anderson's eligibility to participate in any League-sponsored debate (two-way or three-way) diminished. And as this debate was being contemplated, we soon discovered within our camp a considerable difference of opinion over accepting it. Some thought that Carter was closing in on Reagan and considered the debate essential to reverse the momentum.

[5] Memorandum, Myles Martel to James Baker, III, Sept. 30, 1980

Others, relying on Wirthlin's polls, believed Reagan held a comfortable lead and should therefore avoid the risk of another debate. Ultimately, it was decided that Reagan could not afford to refuse. Refusing would give Carter a strongly marketable issue with less than three weeks to election day.

Little did we know in mid October as we contemplated a second presidential debate that Carter's top political strategists were planning to avoid it—a position supported by both his wife, Rosalynn, and by his pollster, Pat Caddell. At that point Reagan was trailing Carter slightly in most polls and was losing momentum as Carter was gaining it. Their plan involved presenting Reagan with an ultimatum that they felt he had to refuse: debate Carter by the end of that week or there would be no debate.[6] Clearly, Carter wanted to minimize Reagan's opportunity to prepare. This scheme was, however, preempted by the League which suddenly abandoned the condition that Anderson be included in a three-way debate. The League plan, unlike Carter's, would give Reagan at least ten days of preparation time.

Once Reagan decided to debate Carter, Baker again set in motion the process which preceded the Baltimore debate. Gergen's and Hodsoll's briefing team spent approximately 12 consecutive 12-hour to 18-hour days refining materials prepared for the Baltimore debate, adding sections on foreign policy, a topic not debated in Baltimore. Gergen assembled the expert panelists for the practice debates, prepared numerous position statements and solicited strategy memoranda. Baker, Carruthers and Burch hammered out a complex format with Carter's representatives (Robert Strauss, Jody Powell and Jerry Rafshoon) and attended to numerous other logistical details. Sorg resumed the background research on the panelists. Ursomarso and his staff once again meticulously orchestrated the advance operation.

Wirthlin, his assistant Richard Beal, and I prepared a series of strategy and tactics memoranda. These memos were based upon: (1) Wirthlin's campaign plan; (2) polling information; and (3) my analysis of Carter's and Reagan's debating styles. My analysis focused upon the "response behavior" of the two candidates in various question-and-answer forums. In Carter's case, I examined the 1976 presidential debates between Carter and Ford, as well as recent press conferences and "Town Meetings." In Reagan's, I studied the various presidential primary forums, plus the more recent debate with Anderson.

Goals and Strategy for Cleveland

Reagan's broad goal for the Cleveland debate was again to perform very respectably. The main strategy is captured in the opening paragraph of his strategy memorandum.

> If the Governor succeeds Tuesday in making Jimmy Carter's record the major issue of the debate and the campaign, we will succeed in the debate and win the general election.
>
> If, however, Carter makes Ronald Reagan the issue of the debate and the campaign, we will lose both.[7]

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[6] *New York Times*, 9 November 1980, p. 1.

[7] Memorandum, Richard Wirthlin, Richard Beal and Myles Martel to Governor Reagan, October 21, 1980.

Reagan's target audience for this debate was Republicans and ticket splitters. Specifically, he needed to increase their turnout on election day for, according to Wirthlin's polling information, if the turnout of Reagan's supporters would exceed Carter's by 2%, Reagan's Electoral College margin would increase by 30 votes.

As the debate approached, we questioned increasingly how Reagan should relate to the unpredictable, constantly changing circumstances surrounding the possible release by election day (or even by the day of the debate) of the 52 American hostages held by the Iranian militants. To what extent, if any, was Carter using this situation as a foil against the debate and Reagan's campaign in general? And to what extent, if any, should Reagan comment on the situation before, during or after the debate? As we contemplated these issues there was some feeling in our camp that Carter might excuse himself from the debate and fly to Germany to greet the freed hostages or use the debate to make a disarming announcement regarding them.

No less onerous was the dilemma we faced in attempting to counter Carter's apparent success in recent weeks in portraying Reagan as dangerous—as far too inclined to use military force before exhausting diplomatic initiatives. Dozens of meetings and general conversations focused on whether or not Reagan should explicitly attack Carter for exploiting this fear tactic? Or would such an approach project undue defensiveness or result in effective counterargument by Carter?

While we never agreed on whether or not Reagan should attack Carter pointedly during the debate for his "mad bomber" charges, Reagan felt, and no one within the inner circle disagreed, that he could defuse his "dangerous" image by remaining presidential. This could be accomplished by his projecting an overall good-natured approach to the debate, by focusing as much as possible on Carter's domestic failures rather than on defense and foreign policy issues, and by allowing Carter to establish the attack tone of the debate. In this latter regard Reagan was advised not to surpass, but to respond in kind, to the tone and amount of attack levelled by Carter. Attacking too hard, we felt, could result in voter backlash and reinforce the "mad bomber" perception.

Contrary to our strategy, however, several of the memoranda received from prominent Republicans advocated a "no holds barred" attack on Carter's record, anticipating that Carter would direct such an attack against Reagan—which, in fact, he did not do in the debate. No one on the debate task force (myself included) expected Carter to direct such an assault. We believed he would attempt, instead, to soften his recently publicized reputation for "meanness."

Preparations for Cleveland

The task force's first meeting with Reagan in preparation for Cleveland was held on October 25, four days before the debate. I began the session by presenting him with a video-taped debate profile of Jimmy Carter based principally on excerpts drawn from the 1976 presidential debates. This program was intended to be educational and motivational. Educationally, it conveyed to Reagan (and to Congressman Stockman, now the Carter stand-in) what I perceived as Carter's meanness toward Ford, his evasiveness, proneness to attack, and penchant for specifics. Motivationally, it was intended to instill a fighting spirit in the Governor, who is not naturally combative. In fact, his good-naturedness probably accounted for his treading at lease somewhat too lightly on Carter's record during the Baltimore debate.

Shortly after this presentation, Wirthlin, Baker and I briefed the Governor on strategy and tactics. The seven points stressed most were:

1. Keep the debate focused as much as possible on Carter's record. Meet offensive with offensive. Don't feel obligated to defend particulars of your positions.
2. Show righteous indignation in responding to:
   a. Carter's attacks or innuendos that you are dangerous.
   b. Attacks directed at your California credentials.
   Looking directly at Carter in such instances may be very effective.
3. Humor or a confident smile can also disarm Carter when he thinks he's got you where he wants you.
4. When Carter is speaking—especially when he is attacking you–look at him or take notes.
5. Wherever possible, weave your major theme into your responses: "Jimmy Carter has had his chance and has blown it (relate to examples that fit question); you offer promise—hope."
6. Conclude your responses with an attack line against Carter or a people-oriented line based on your proposals.
7. Show compassion by drawing from experiences on the campaign trail . . . .[8]

The remaining two and a half days before the Cleveland debate were principally devoted to practice sessions. Carruthers served as moderator while Reagan's major economic, domestic and foreign policy advisors (including several from outside the campaign staff) played the role of panelists. The day before the Reagan-Carter debate, I also served as a panelist along with Martin Anderson and Hayden Bryan. Anderson was Reagan's chief domestic advisor in the campaign, while Bryan (who took a vacation leave to work on the debate preparations) was a policy analyst for the Labor and Human Resources Committee of the U.S. Senate. Baker chaired the critique sessions which generally followed each round of questions.

As was the case leading up to the Baltimore debate, Reagan was at his best when Stockman (Carter's stand-in) was doggedly on the attack. Particularly during the Sunday practice session, Stockman's taunting could not throw Reagan off balance. Reagan displayed impressive equanimity, increasing responsiveness, and a greater willingness to attack Carter's record. Moreover, there were no gaffes during this or any other session; in short, Reagan appeared ready for Carter.

On Monday, October 27, the morning before the debate, the atmosphere became tense. Not only were the stakes of the debate more pronounced than ever, but Reagan was having difficulty hitting his stride. The uncertain Iranian hostage crisis was apparently wearing on him. And compounding these pressures was the burden of reviewing refined position statements on Iran and Salt II, which had been prepared throughout the day by his major advisors.

Following a lengthy lunch the same day with former President Ford, Reagan returned to the studio for the last practice session before Cleveland. It, too, was lackluster, leaving the team with an uneasy feeling about how he would perform in Cleveland. Reagan, however, appeared less worried, remarking in typical good humor that a perfect dress rehearsal was always the best way to ruin the opening night.

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[8] Memorandum, James Baker, III and Myles Martel to Governor Reagan, October 24, 1980.

Table 3. Reagan vs. Carter, Cleveland Debate, October 28, 1980.

Format I		
	Four first-round questions:	
	Question to Candidate A:	:30
	Candidate A response:	2:00
	Follow-up question:	:30
	Candidate A response	1:00
	Same question to Candidate B:	:30
	Candidate B response:	2:00
	Follow-up question:	:30
	Candidate B response:	1:00
	Candidate A rebuttal:	1:00
	Candidate B rebuttal:	1:00
	TOTAL	10:00
	(4 × 10 minutes = 40 minutes)	
Format II		
	Four second-round questions:	
	Question to candidate A:	:30
	Candidate A response:	2:00
	Same question to Candidate B:	:30
	Candidate B response:	2:00
	Candidate A rebuttal:	1:30
	Candidate B rebuttal:	1:30
	Candidate A surrebuttal:	1:00
	Candidate B surrebuttal:	1:00
	TOTAL	10:00
	(4 × 10 minutes = 40 minutes)	
Closing Statements		
	Candidate A:	3 minutes
	Candidate B:	3 minutes
	Moderator close:	30 seconds

The Cleveland Format

The format for the Cleveland debate is probably the most complex one ever devised. In fact, what more than 100 million viewers saw were two back-to-back, 40-minute debates (Table 3). The format was fair to Reagan and, in all likelihood, did not favor one candidate over the other. We were not enamored with the follow-up question feature incorporated into Format I, because follow-ups tend to favor the more informed incumbent. On the other hand, we were pleased with the question repetition feature. We were also comfortable with the response times in Formats I and II being confined to two minutes. In our view the longer the response segment, the greater the incumbent's advantage and the greater the potential for misstatements.

The most interesting development of the entire format negotiation process occurred the morning before the debate when Baker received a call from Strauss requesting that Reagan take the first question and close last. Up to that point Carter, by virtue of having won a coin toss, had elected the first question/last close option. As we discussed this issue with Reagan in the comfort of his living room, we were uncertain about Strauss' motives, although we felt he probably wanted Reagan to "take the heat" first, there-

by giving Carter a greater opportunity to reflect, focus, and set the tone of his attack. With an air of tentativeness more pronounced than at any other point leading up to either debate, most of us counselled Reagan to gamble and seize upon the opportunity presented by Strauss' request. We felt that Reagan's opportunity to give the last closing address could preclude surprises created if Carter had the last close and give Reagan psychological control over the end of the debate. Reagan decided to take the gamble.

Strauss' ploy backfired. While Reagan got off to a hesitant start in fielding the first question (something we thought might happen because he had a similar problem in Baltimore), he improved rapidly and soon displayed considerable confidence.

"There You Go Again" and Reagan's Five Compelling Questions

If any Reagan tactic during the Cleveland debate qualifies as a masterstroke, it was his use of the line, "There you go again," when responding to a potentially damaging attack by Carter. Reagan had been advised during the strategy sessions and the videotape analysis of Carter's debate style to use lines which could dramatically differentiate himself from Carter, especially since this was one of Carter's own pronounced tactics against Ford during the 1976 debates. "There you go again," crafted by Reagan himself and practiced on Stockman two days earlier, successfully elevated Reagan without projecting him as unduly strident or defensive—indeed a formidable challenge when refuting an incumbent President.

Possibly approximating the impact of "There you go again" (if not surpassing it) were the five rhetorical questions Reagan used in his closing address. These, Reagan believed, captured the essence of his audience's attitudes about their lives during Carter's four years as President and gave him the psychological control over the close of the debate that he sought when he accepted Strauss' request that he open first and close last.

> Next Tuesday, all of you will go to the polls, and stand there in the polling place and make a decision. I think when you make that decision it might be well if you ask yourself, are you better off than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago? Is there more or less unemployment in the country than there was four years ago? Is America as respected throughout the world as it was? Do you feel that our security is as safe, that we're as strong as we were four years ago?[9]

Post-Debate Influence

A prevailing perception as we prepared for both debates was that the media's reaction to them would be as important, if not more so, than the viewer's immediate reactions. This perception was reinforced by research conducted after the second presidential debate in 1976 wherein President Ford committed his infamous gaffe concerning Eastern Europe. The research revealed that immediately following the debate Ford was perceived as the winner, but due to the media's play of the gaffe, Carter soon surpassed him.[10]

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[9] These lines are largely similar to those contained in a draft of the closing address prepared by David Gergen.

[10] See Frederick T. Steeper, "Public Response to Gerald Ford's Statements on Eastern Europe in the Second Debate," in *The Presidential Debates: Media, Elec-*

The campaign's concern for potential media influence of the debate results prompted the organization of an extensive surrogate effort. Led by veteran political consultant Clifford White, it involved making available to the media major credible Reagan advocates who, after being briefed by surrogate team leaders, would tell reporters that Reagan won, often citing reasons congruent with Reagan's debate goals. For example, following the second debate, the most frequent reaction to Reagan's performance was that he projected himself as "reasonable" and "presidential"—remarks which sought to diminish the widespread and gnawing perception that he was dangerous.

The surrogate efforts of the competing candidates in Baltimore and Cleveland is a study of striking contrasts. Reagan's surrogates took control of the media in Baltimore. Anderson's effort was far less organized, possibly because he may have had difficulty securing well-known, qualified people to comment on his behalf. Following the Cleveland debate, however, the thick air of competition between Carter and Reagan on stage was carried to the post-debate interviews where representatives from both camps vied for maximum coverage.

A related effort to control the post-debate media influence of the Cleveland debate was the establishment of a special Debate Operations Center at Reagan's National Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. During and immediately following the debate approximately 50 researchers monitored closely Reagan's and Carter's remarks for errors or omissions which might draw the media's attention. If, for instance, Carter had made a major factual error and the quality of Reagan's debate performance was in question, then a representative of the Center would present to the press a refutation. However, since Reagan and his major advisors were confident, if not jubilant, over his performance, they considered it unnecessary to continue the debate in the press.

Probably the most influential post-debate event was the telephone call-in poll conducted by ABC. Although Carter's aides were quick to assail its methodology—and justifiably so—tens of millions of Americans saw Reagan outdistancing Carter in the poll by a 2 to 1 margin before they turned off their television sets. Additional millions of voters were exposed to lead stories about these results the following morning in newspapers and on television news programs.

What the Cleveland Debate did for Reagan

Most analysts and commentators agree that Reagan outperformed Carter, that he succeeded in making Carter's record the issue of the debate, defused the "mad bomber" image, and (as a result of his overall performance) stemmed Carter's threatening campaign momentum. Most will also agree with the assessment the President-elect shared with me the day following the election: "The debate with President Carter was, in my view, a critical element in our success in the election."[11]

While many explanations have been offered for the widely shared impression that Reagan outperformed Carter in Cleveland (and while most appear cogent), one view shared amongst the members of the debate task force has not achieved the attention it merits: since Reagan had engaged

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toral and Policy Perspectives, eds. George F. Bishop, Robert G. Meadow and Marilyn Jackson-Beeck (New York: Praeger, 1978), pp. 81–101.

[11] Letter, Ronald Reagan to Myles Martel, November 5, 1980.

in six debates leading up to Cleveland (while Carter had repeatedly refused to debate since early January), Reagan had become far more comfortable in the debate setting than Carter. Indeed, the maxim that "there is no substitute for experience" was validated by the Reagan campaign.

The Future of Presidential Debates

It would be no exaggeration to compare the 1980 presidential debate preparation process with an advanced game of chess. Nearly every move regarding the decisions to debate, formats, strategies and tactics, and the execution of the debates themselves, was fraught with political implications. One mismove—one untoward statement or look—and the election could have been lost.

As a fervent advocate of political debates, I left this experience more convinced than ever that the candidates should retain control of the process, particularly the decision to debate, scheduling and format design. To make presidential debates mandatory and to make a neutral third party mainly responsible for their preparation raises too great a risk that, intentionally or not, one candidate could become favored over the other.[12]

When the public seriously desires presidential debates, they exercise considerable pressure on the candidate's campaign strategies. Almost any candidate (particularly one in a close race) must reckon with the danger of damaging publicity resulting from a refusal to debate. The record of the 1980 presidential campaign—both the primary elections and the general election—suggests that voluntary debates may be more likely to occur. Certainly, they should be more difficult to avoid.

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[12] See James Karayn, "The Case for Permanent Presidential Debates" in *The Past and Future of Presidential Debates*, ed. Austin J. Ranney (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), pp. 155–174. For a refutation of mandatory debates and a discussion of the role of public pressure in encouraging debates, see Twentieth Century Fund, *With the Nation Watching: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Televised Presidential Debates* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1979), pp. 77–80.

THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS

PATRICIA RILEY AND THOMAS A. HOLLIHAN

The 1980 Presidential election, which some pundits had predicted might be so close a contest that it would end up being decided in the House of Representatives,[1] was instead climaxed by a landslide victory for Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. Not since Franklin Delano Roosevelt swept Herbert Hoover from office during the Great Depression had the American people so vehemently rejected a sitting president. The final outcome left chagrined pollsters, who up until the day of the election had declared the race "too close to call," seeking an explanation. Many of the pollsters cited the debate between President Jimmy Carter and challenger Ronald Reagan as the cause of the dramatic shift in public opinion. Daniel Yankelovich, pollster for *Time*, who had found Carter ahead in his last poll two weeks prior to the debate, found that public opinion changed radically after the debate. "The dissatisfaction with Carter was there all along," he said, "but people couldn't bring themselves to vote for Reagan. The debate changed all that."[2]

When debates between presidential candidates do occur, they always seem to become focal points of the election campaign. As important media events they attract wide public audiences and are also the focus of comments by print and broadcast news analysts, editorialists, and academicians, of many different stripes.

There were two major debates between presidential candidates during the 1980 campaign. On September 21, 1980, Republican candidate Ronald Reagan debated independent candidate John Anderson. President Carter was invited to participate but declined.[3] Then on October 28, 1980, President Carter and Governor Reagan met to debate. Representative Anderson was not invited to participate in this debate in part because Carter refused to debate Anderson unless first given an opportunity to confront Reagan in a head-to-head contest.[4]

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[1] For a time there were fears that independent candidate John Anderson would capture enough public support to deny either Carter or Reagan the majority of electoral votes needed for election. In the event of such an instance the House of Representatives is charged with selecting the president.

[2] "Anatomy of a Landslide," *Time* (Nov. 17, 1980), p. 31.

[3] Carter wished to avoid debating both Reagan and Anderson on the same platform because he believed Anderson not to be a legitimate candidate and because he viewed Anderson as a "spoiler" who would draw more votes from him than from Reagan. To debate Anderson would serve only to legitimize his candidacy. See Howard Rosenberg, "Candidate Debates: The Big Turn-On," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Sept. 1980, sec. 6, pp. 1, 15.

[4] Congressman Anderson was excluded from the October 28th debate by a ruling from the League of Women Voters, who sponsored the contests, that to be considered a viable candidate entitled to participation he would need to register at least

This study undertakes a content analysis of the presidential debates in order to examine the argument types, evidence use, analysis, and issues developed by the candidates. The 1980 debates are then compared to previous presidential debates in terms of these same criteria.

The Study of Presidential Debating

Communication scholars have a legitimate interest in presidential debates. Walter Fisher recently noted that debates: ". . . are the most telling of all political forms of communication. They give the electorate more of what it needs to know about presidential hopefuls—more than television spots, billboards, editorials, pamphlets, speeches, essays or books. In no other mode of presentation does the candidate risk or reveal so much of his character."[5]

Researchers have examined presidential debates from a number of different perspectives including: their contribution to voter knowledge,[6] their impact on candidate image,[7] their influence on public agendas,[8] and their importance to the flow of public informtion and the development of public "meaning."[9]

Other studies have sought to examine the debates from an argumentative perspective to determine if the debates were, in fact, rational exercises different in content from other forms of campaign communication. John Ellsworth, in a content analysis study of the 1960 debates, developed a category system to determine which of the two candidates used the more rational arguments. Ellsworth found that the 1960 debates helped clarify the campaign issues while offering voters an opportunity to witness the candidates in "action" as opposed to merely reading a speech. Ellsworth also found that both Nixon and Kennedy used more evidence and analysis in developing their arguments in the debates than they did in other campaign situations.[10]

In a content analysis of the 1976 presidential debates Riley, Hollihan, and Cooley used the primary elements of Ellsworth's category system to examine the Carter-Ford contests. They found that substantial message strategy differences existed between the candidates: Carter was far more

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15% in the public opinion polls. Some polls in late October were showing Anderson with as little as 8% support. See William Endicott, "Anderson, Left Out of Debate Format, Lashes Out at Sponsor, Polls, Carter," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Oct. 1980, sec. 1, p. 32.

[5] Walter R. Fisher, "Soap Box Derby," *University of Southern California Chronicle* (October 1980), p. 3.

[6] A. H. Miller and M. MacKuen, "Informing the Electorate: A National Study," in *The Great Debates, Carter vs. Ford, 1976*, ed. Sidney Kraus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 269–97.

[7] Jack Dennis, Steven H. Chaffee, and Sun Yuel Choe, "Impact on Partisan Image, and Issue Voting," in *The Great Debates* (Carter vs. Ford), pp. 314–30.

[8] Lee B. Becker, David H. Weaver, Doris A. Graber, and Maxwell E. McCombs, "Influences on Public Agendas," in *The Great Debates* (Carter vs. Ford), pp. 418–28.

[9] Samuel L. Becker, Robert Pepper, Lawrence A. Wenner, and Jin Keon Kim, "Information Flow and the Shaping of Meanings," in *The Great Debates* (Carter vs. Ford), pp. 384–97.

[10] John W. Ellsworth, "Rationality and Campaigning: A Content Analysis of the 1960 Presidential Campaign Debates," *Western Political Quarterly* 18 (1965), 794–802.

critical of Ford than was Ford of Carter; Ford was much more defensive than was Carter; Ford used more evidence than did Carter; and Ford used more analysis than did Carter. While Ford made analytical statements and statements of evidence more frequently than did Carter, Carter relied primarily on declarative statements.[11]

This study undertakes an analysis of the 1980 presidential debates like that completed by Riley, Hollihan, and Cooley of the 1976 debates. The arguments and issues are examined to enable comparisons among the candidates and to allow us to search for patterns in the genre of presidential debating.

Method of Analysis

This study employs a hand-coded content analysis of the communication contained in the two 1980 presidential debates. Content analysis is a systematic and vigorous means of describing the use of symbols in public communication which permits the study of large quantities of data in an orderly fashion.

The key to any content analysis system is the quality of its categories and the ability of coders (who are familiar with the criteria) to code messages similarly. As Holsti observed: "Systematic means that the inclusion and exclusion of content of categories is done according to consistently applied rules. This requirement clearly eliminates analysis in which only materials supporting the investigator's hypotheses are admitted as evidence. It also implies that the categories are defined in a manner which permits them to be used according to consistently applied rules."[12]

The "theme" was chosen as the unit of analysis. A theme is a single assertion about some subject. It may be a phrase, a sentence, or a longer complete thought. Holsti, in a more detailed explanation of its uses, has cited its advantages and disadvantages, and suggested the theme as an appropriate choice for a study of this kind.[13] The theme is used in this study because it most accurately facilitates the comparison of the candidates' discrete statements.

Three coders independently but simultaneously coded[14] the themes as revealed in the written texts of the debates published in the *New York Times*.[15] All debate statements were categorized into the following argument types adapted from those developed by Ellsworth:

Analysis: Any statement of a position which is supported by reasoning and/or a discussion of consequences is classified as analysis.

Declaration: Any statement by a candidate which neither reasons, nor offers a discussion of consequences, nor offers evidence for support of the statement is classified as declaration.

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[11] Patricia Riley, Thomas A. Hollihan, and David M. Cooley, "The 1976 Presidential Debates: An Analysis of the Issues and Arguments," paper presented at the Central States Speech Association Convention, Chicago, April, 1980.

[12] Ole R. Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p. 14.

[13] Holsti, p. 116.

[14] Inter-rater reliability was computed using Scott's index of reliability; see Holsti, pp. 140–41.

[15] The text for the first debate appeared in *The New York Times*, 23 Sept. 1980, pp. B10–11. The text for the second debate appeared in *The New York Times*, 29 Oct. 1980, pp. A26–29.

Evidence: Any statement which utilizes evidence in a non-analytic fashion, to support any position either specially espoused or assumed to be espoused by the candidate is classified as evidence.[16]

Additionally, we were interested (as Ellsworth was in his 1960 debates study) in identifying those statements which criticized the opponent and those statements which were in response to criticisms. These sub-categories were labeled critical and defensive statements and were only used to code remarks directly at, or directly responding to the other candidate. These categories were not used for remarks directed to the press. In the Reagan-Anderson debate critical statements were separated into those directed at each other and those directed at President Carter (who, of course, was not present). Nine categories of argument types were developed and statements were coded as either: simple analysis, simple declarative, simple evidence, critical analysis, critical declarative, critical evidence, defensive analysis, defensive declarative, or defensive evidence. In this context, a "simple" statement is one which is neither critical nor defensive.

The themes were also simultaneously categorized according to their manifest content—operationally defined as the issues they addressed. For example, if Reagan stated: "Our unemployment rate under this administration is higher than this nation can stand!" the statement was coded as a critical declarative argument on the economy. The issue categories were determined by the coders' analysis of the issues discussed in the debates. If the categories were found to overlap, they were combined or made more specific. Every attempt was made to ensure that the category titles accurately reflected the statements they represented and to make them mutually exclusive. The investigators found that the following categories represented the issues in the two debates:

Energy: This category deals with energy shortages, energy sources, energy programs, conservation, and the environment.

Foreign Relations: This category covers general foreign policy issues such as United States' influence in the world, foreign trade, détente, treaties, and international agreements.

Economy: This category contains statements concerning inflation, unemployment, taxes, and government waste.

Big Government: This category contains statements concerning government regulation, responsiveness to citizen needs, bureaucratic structures, and anti-Washington sentiments.

Military: This category deals with American military power and strength in general. It also deals with statements concerning nuclear weapons and new weapons systems. It also included statements concerning the domestic implications of military issues.

Symbolic America: This category contains references to our nation or to our democratic heritage. It encompasses the pursuit of peace, prestige, nationalism, and the character of the American people.

Religion: This category contains statements regarding the separation of church and state, the role of religion and religious leaders in the American political system, and moral issues such as abortion.

Presidential Campaign/Leadership: This category contains statements about the candidate's actions and attributes, personal criticisms by one candidate to another, remarks about the campaign, and the nature of presidential leadership and the presidency.

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[16] Ellsworth, p. 795.

The category system thus permitted each theme to be simultaneously coded in an argument-type and an issue category.

The content analysis provides the data for answering the following general research questions: first, how do the candidates compare in terms of use of analysis, evidence, and declarative statements? Second, which of the candidates seemed to be the most critical of his opponents and which seemed most defensive? Third, how do the two debates compare in terms of issues, types of arguments, candidate aggressiveness, candidate defensiveness, and the use of evidence, analysis, and declarative statements? Finally, how do these debates compare to those of 1960 and 1976 in terms of the use of evidence, analysis, declarative statements, candidate aggressiveness, and candidate defensiveness?

We ask these questions in order to gain insight into a number of different aspects of the debates. First, those who emphasize the importance of presidential debates to the election process do so out of the conviction that debates are more rational than other types of campaign events. A content analysis of the debates provides the data necessary to determine whether or not the debates actually contain rational arguments supported by evidence or analysis.

Second, the number of critical and defensive statements is also of interest. Candidates strive to demonstrate that they perceive the weaknesses of their opponents and that they do not possess those same weaknesses. The conventional wisdom of campaign strategists is that candidates must be very cautious in criticizing their opponents, or they may appear to be vindictive and unfair. Likewise, candidates must defend themselves against criticisms leveled at them by their opponents but must not appear overly defensive.

Third, by comparing the 1980 debates with those of 1960 and 1976 a number of observations about the differences or similarities among these contests become possible. As debates take place over time, perhaps expected behaviors and strategies will develop. These anticipated behaviors may help explain public reactions to the debates. Since this year's contest involved President Carter in the role of incumbent rather than challenger still other comparisons are possible due to his change in role. In the 1976 debates against incumbent President Ford, Carter was very critical of his opponent's record. In the 1980 debate we can observe whether or not Carter as an incumbent must suddenly become defensive now that it is his own record being criticized.

Results

The overall inter-rater reliability level, computed using Scott's index of reliability, was .91 for the two debates.

The data from the two debates are discussed as percentages of themes in a category. As all statements in both debates were coded (as opposed to using samples), the resulting percentages are directly comparable. In addition, chi-square tests of significant differences between the candidates were performed for each category. For a difference between candidates to be regarded as statistically significant in this study, it must be at the $p = .05$ level.

The results from the first debate between Governor Reagan and Representative John Anderson showed the candidates to be very similar in their use of argument types (see Table 1). Specifically, we discovered they were similar in their use of declarative statements (about 62% for each debater) and evidence statements (approximately 22% for Reagan and 25%

Table 1. Analysis, evidence and declarative statements in the Reagan-Anderson debate.

Type of statement	Anderson	Reagan
Analytical statements	13.4%	16.7%
Evidence statements	24.8%	21.6%
Declarative statements	61.7%	61.9%
Totals:	99.9%	100.2%

Note: totals exceed and fall short of 100% due to rounding off individual percentages.

for Anderson). In their use of analysis, the difference between Reagan's 16.7% and Anderson's 13.4% is still not remarkable. The difference between their criticism of President Carter (almost 6% for Reagan and nearly 11% for Anderson) was the most notable of the comparisons.

The categories which seem to be most interesting are the total critical statements and total defensive statements—computed across the declarative, analytical, and evidence categories (see Table 2). The critical themes showed quite a difference with Anderson being critical 29% of the time, but Reagan using critical statements only 13% of the time. Defensive statements, however, were used 9% of the time by Reagan but only about 3% of the time by Anderson (see Table 2). The difference in critical statements is statistically significant at the .01 level ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 9.62$). For a breakdown of statements into all nine categories, see Table 3.

The issue content comparisons followed the same pattern with little discrimination between the candidates on most of the issues. The only two issue categories which appear to have been important in distinguishing between Reagan and Anderson were "Presidential Campaign/Leadership" and "Symbolic America." These were the only two issue categories in the Reagan-Anderson debate to show statistically significant differences between the candidates (see Table 4). Reagan made a significantly greater use of the "Symbolic America" category (with over 17% of his statements in this area) than did Anderson with only about 2% of his remarks so coded ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 17.28$, $p < .01$). In contrast, Anderson devoted significantly more of his statements to the issue of the "Presidential Campaign/Leadership" (nearly 11%) than did Reagan (1.4%) who virtually ignored this issue ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 11.57$, $p < .01$).

In the second debate (Carter vs. Reagan) the content analysis pointed out more argument and issue differences than were found in the previous debate (see Tables 5 and 6). In examining the data on argument types, one

Table 2. Critical and defensive statements in the Reagan-Anderson debate.

Type of statement	Anderson	Reagan
Critical statements*	29.1%	13.2%
Defensive statements	2.8%	9.0%
Direct statements	68.1%	77.8%
Totals:	100.0%	100.0%

* Significant at alpha = .01.

Table 3. Analysis of the content of the Reagan-Anderson debate.

Type of statement	Anderson	Reagan
Simple analysis	7.1%	13.9%
Simple evidence	17.7%	16.7%
Simple declarative	43.3%	47.2%
Critical analysis	3.5%	1.4%
Critical evidence	4.3%	0.7%
Critical declarative	10.6%	5.6%
Defensive analysis	0	0
Defensive evidence	0.7%	3.5%
Defensive declarative	2.1%	5.6%
Critical declarative on Carter	5.7%	3.5%
Critical analysis on Carter	2.8%	1.4%
Critical evidence on Carter	2.1%	0.7%
Totals:	99.9%	100.2%

Note: Totals exceed and fall short of 100% due to rounding off individual percentages. For the purposes of this chart, "simple" analysis refers to an analytic statement which is neither critical nor defensive. The same interpretation applies to "simple" evidence and "simple" declarative.

discovers that Reagan used declarative statements in about 59% of his themes while Carter used them nearly 74% of the time. In the analysis category, Reagan (with 11%) was significantly ahead of Carter who used less than 6% analytical themes ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 4.68$, $p < .05$). In using evidence, Reagan again significantly outstripped Carter almost 30% to less than 21% ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 4.54$, $p < .05$).

In checking the use of critical and defensive statements, we found that Reagan's themes were critical in 45% of his statements as opposed to Carter whose themes were critical only 27% of the time. This constitutes a statistically significant difference ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 11.84$, $p < .01$). Reagan also was significantly more defensive than was Carter by 16% to 8% ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 7.95$, $p < .01$).

Table 4. Issues in the Reagan-Anderson debate.

Issue	Anderson	Reagan
Energy	12.1%	13.9%
Foreign relations	1.4%	0
Economy	46.1%	44.4%
Big government	3.5%	6.3%
Military	14.9%	10.4%
Symbolic America*	2.1%	17.4%
Religion	9.2%	6.3%
Presidential campaign and presidential leadership*	10.6%	1.4%
Totals:	99.9%	100.1%

Note: Totals exceed and fall short of 100% due to rounding off individual percentages.

* Significant at alpha = .01.

Table 5. Analysis, evidence and declarative statements in the Reagan-Carter debate

Type of statement	Carter	Reagan
Analytic statements*	5.7%	11.0%
Evidence statements*	20.7%	29.9%
Declarative statements	73.6%	59.1%
Totals	100.0%	100.0%

* Significant at alpha = .05.

Among the specific types of argument, simple declarative themes and critical evidence themes showed large differences between the candidates (see Table 7). Carter used simple declarative themes almost 48% of the time while Reagan used them only about 28% of the time, which proved to be a statistically significant difference ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 11.89$, $p < .01$). In contrast, Reagan's statements were categorized as critical evidence more often than Carter's statements (approximately 18% to 6%), which constituted another significant difference ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 16.83$, $p < .01$).

The analysis of issue categories in the second debate showed that the candidates differed in the emphasis that they gave to various topics (see Table 8). Carter focused on the energy issue in nearly 15% of his statements while it was the topic of only about 8% of Reagan's statements. In contrast, Reagan dealt with the economy in over 36% of his themes but Carter only had about 22% of his themes in this category. Finally, Carter made more use of the "Symbolic America" category (approximately 11% to 4%) and made more use of the "Presidential Campaign/Leadership" category (about 21% to 14%) than did Reagan. As it developed, only the difference between Carter and Reagan on the economic topic proved to be statistically significant ($df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 9.02$, $p < .01$).

Table 6. Critical and defensive statements in the Reagan-Carter debate.

Type of statement	Carter	Reagan
Critical statements*	27%	45%
Defensive statements*	8%	16%
Direct statements	65%	39%
Totals:	100%	100%

* Significant at alpha = .01.

Discussion

The Reagan-Anderson Debate

The first debate between Governor Reagan and Congressman Anderson was characterized by the media as an event which pointed out striking differences in the candidates' positions on the issues.[17] The data reported in this study suggest that Anderson did conform to his pre-debate strategy of establishing himself as a clear alternative to Governor Reagan by illu-

[17] Jack Nelson, "Anderson and Reagan Differ on Most Issues," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Sept. 1980, p. 1.

Table 7. Analysis of the content of the Reagan-Carter debate.

Type of statement	Carter	Reagan
Simple analysis	3.4%	2.0%
Simple evidence	13.8%	8.6%
Simple declarative*	47.9%	28.3%
Critical analysis	1.5%	6.1%
Critical evidence*	6.1%	18.4%
Critical declarative	19.2%	20.1%
Defensive analysis	0.8%	2.9%
Defensive evidence	0.8%	2.9%
Defensive declarative	6.5%	10.7%
Totals:	100.0%	100.0%

* Significant at alpha = .01.

Note: For the purposes of this chart, "simple" analysis refers to an analytic statement which is neither critical nor defensive. The same interpretation applies to "simple" evidence and "simple" declarative.

minating their differing positions on the issues. But this analysis also reveals that Anderson's and Reagan's debating styles differed as well.

While Reagan and Anderson showed very similar use of the three basic argument types—evidence, declarative, and analysis statements—the tenor of their arguments differed greatly. Anderson's statements were critical of Reagan in 29% of his coded themes. This was more than twice the number of statements in which Reagan was critical of Anderson (13%). While newspaper reports noted that the candidates' debating styles differed,[18] this was mainly attributed to Anderson's formality and precision. This analysis suggests the large gap between Anderson's and Reagan's use of critical statements could be largely responsible for the perceived style differences.

The large number of critical statements made by Anderson also probably accounts for the fact that Reagan had three times as many defensive themes as Anderson (9% to 3%). Since this is still a small percentage of the arguments in the forum, Reagan did not allow Anderson's critical tone to put him on the defensive throughout the debate—a position no candidate desires.

Anderson's strategy to use the debate to distinguish himself from Reagan, and not as a forum to attack Carter[19] was reasonably followed. Only 11% of Anderson's statements were critical of President Carter. Reagan was even less critical of Carter (only 6% of the time), thus allowing Anderson the role of the aggressive challenger.

The candidates stayed with each other on most of the issue topics, clearly comparing their records and positions on the various issues. This analysis found there was little difference in their attention to the topics except in the "Symbolic America" category and "President Campaign/Leadership" category. This variance may well point out what the press referred to as Anderson's humorless technician style and Reagan's folksy, good-humored style.[20] Reagan had 17% of his statements in the "Symbolic America" category, a topic area which encompasses the goodness of the American char-

[18] Jack Nelson and Robert Shogan, "Who Won? Three Candidates Gained, Lost in Debate," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Sept. 1980, p. p. 1.

Table 8. Issues in the Reagan-Carter debate.

Issues	Carter	Reagan
Energy	14.6%	8.2%
Foreign relations	18.4%	17.2%
Economy*	21.8%	36.1%
Big government	5.4%	9.8%
Military	8.4%	10.2%
Symbolic America	10.7%	4.1%
Religion	0	0
Presidential campaign and Presidential leadership	20.7%	14.3%
Totals:	100.0%	99.9%

Note: Reagan's total falls short of 100% due to rounding off individual percentages.

* Significant at alpha = .01.

acter, the high moral nature of our values and ideals, and America's rightful place in history as well as our role in the future of the world. In contrast, only 2% of Anderson's statements were in this topic area. Always practical, Anderson instead chose to make an issue of the presidential campaign and of presidential leadership. He had 11% of his statements focusing on this issue while Reagan spoke on this topic only 1% of the time. Anderson was stressing this topic, no doubt, because he was attempting to convince the American people that his candidacy was a serious and a legitimate one, and that in this instance they should not think about their party identification in casting their ballots, but should think about the skills that the man in the White House needs to possess. Of course, the candidates' ability to address certain types of issues was limited to some extent by the questions posed to them by the panel of journalists. Nevertheless, all three debaters demonstrated considerable dexterity in weaving their own agendas into responses to journalists' questions.

Overall, the analysis of the first of the 1980 presidential debates found Reagan and Anderson using similar amounts of analysis and evidence, but the tone of their arguments was quite different. Anderson was far more aggressive and critical of his opponents than was Reagan. In addition, Reagan appealed primarily to the national pride and character of the American people, while Anderson emphasized more pragmatic issues.

The Reagan-Carter Debate

The second debate of the 1980 presidential campaign pitted incumbent President Jimmy Carter against challenger Governor Ronald Reagan. Carter finally had Reagan where he had claimed that he wanted Reagan: "in a head-to-head debate, with no third candidate, and the election hanging in the balance."[21] His strategy reportedly was to look "presidential"—to

[19] Jack Nelson and Bill Stall, "Reagan, Anderson to Aim at Each Other in Debate, Not Carter," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Sept. 1980, part 1, p. 5.

[20] Nelson and Shogan, p. 1.

[21] David S. Broder, "The Power of Looking Presidential," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Oct. 1980, part 2, p. 9.

look like the person who is more knowledgeable and has the facts about the cold realities of the world.[22] Given this strategy, one might expect to see Carter using much more analysis and evidence than his opponent. Instead, Reagan used significantly more analysis and significantly more evidence in his arguments than did Carter. Carter ended up relying on assertions (simple declarative statements) rather than on reasoning or facts.

As the incumbent, Carter also had a record that was open to attack. Reagan made use of this opportunity and was far more critical of Carter's policies and positions than Carter was of Reagan's policies and positions. Carter did not allow Reagan to put him on the defensive, however, as Reagan used twice as many defensive statements as did Carter. These data could also indicate that Reagan was more specific in refuting Carter's allegations, while Carter chose to ignore Reagan's arguments rather than rebut them.

The argument category which seems most telling is that of critical evidence themes. Reagan used three times the amount of claims supported by evidence to criticize Carter and his administration than Carter used to criticize Reagan and his policies. This is clearly demonstrated in Reagan's economic arguments. Not only was the economy the only issue category which showed significant differences between the candidates, but more critical evidence was used with regard to economic arguments than on any other single issue. Carter, however, did not focus as heavily on the economy, preferring to talk about energy. Again, these data are probably related—with Carter using the energy issue to help explain his administration's problems with the economy. Regardless of his motives, however, Carter clearly had problems in the debate in his attempts to respond to Reagan's economic indictments of his administration.

The only other issues which showed important differences were "Symbolic America" and "Presidential Campaign/Leadership." Since Reagan was using evidence in specific attacks on the economy, Carter attempted to establish his position in areas where he as an incumbent would have natural credibility. He thus made repeated references to how much closer he felt to the American people since he had served as their president and to the knowledge and experience he had gained in his four-year term. This is consistent with the expressed strategy of Carter's advisors who felt Reagan could be portrayed as not really understanding the complex problems of the presidency and as unprepared for these responsibilities.[23]

While Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter debated in Cleveland, John Anderson held his own debate in Washington, shadow-boxing the television images of the other two candidates after being excluded from their show. One might initially assume that the absence of Anderson probably did little to change Reagan's debate strategy because Anderson was not expected to draw many votes from Reagan. The data from this study, however, suggest that the absence of Anderson may indeed have changed Reagan's debating tactics somewhat. In the only major change from the first debate to the second, Reagan shifted from being far less critical than Anderson in the first debate, to being far more critical than Carter in the second debate. The presence in the debate of an incumbent with a record that was vulnerable to criticism was the most likely explanation for Reagan's change in strategy. While not as dramatic, nor as obvious, Reagan

[22] Broder, part 2, p. 9.

[23] Robert Shogan, "Battle Lines for Tonight's Debate Set," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 Oct. 1980, p. 1.

also practically doubled his refutations to arguments in the second debate, taking greater care to answer Carter's criticisms of him than he had with Anderson's criticisms. We must acknowledge, however, that this difference might also be attributable to a change in format which allowed the candidates more time for rebutting arguments.

In general, the second debate found Carter stressing the importance of "presidential leadership," and being criticized for his handling of the economy." All other conclusions about the debate, however, might pale in comparison to Carter's comment about daughter Amy's views on nuclear war and Reagan's reminiscing about a nation that did not know it had a race problem. While content analysis is systematic, it cannot measure the impact of particular symbolic statements.

1980 Debates vs. the 1976 and 1960 Debates

Direct comparisons across debates from different elections are always difficult as formats change, the issues vary, campaign contexts differ, and the research methods advance. Since presidential debating is still such a new genre of election campaigning, however, comparisons and the search for trends and patterns are important research areas.[24]

The most striking shift from the 1976 debates to the 1980 debates was a return to the direct responses found in the Nixon-Kennedy debates. The percentages of defensive comments in the 1980 debates were much more analogous to the 1960 debates than to the 1976 debates, perhaps responding to media criticisms that the 1976 debates bore little resemblance to debate as a forum for arguments and counter-arguments.

The second characteristic of the 1980 debates was another return to the style of the 1960 debates with the advocates relying much more on evidence to support their claims than they had in the 1976 debates. It is also noteworthy that the advocates used more analysis in developing their arguments in the 1980 debates than was used in the 1976 debates. While it is not possible for us to explain this greater reliance on evidence and analysis, it is praiseworthy. This analysis would suggest that the 1980 debates more resembled actual argumentative confrontations than the 1976 debates did.

Finally, the changes in Carter's use of arguments are noteworthy as he became the first candidate to participate in presidential debates in separate elections. Carter was far more critical of his opponents as a challenger (in 1976) than as an incumbent (in 1980). He focused on the economy much more often when it was Ford's burden and not his own; this seems to be the topic to be exploited by the challenger and to be avoided by the incumbent. Carter did not, however, change his grass roots appeals; his calls to the American people's consciences, their pride, and their sense of love for their country were the same in 1980 as they had been in 1976. Apparently, however, in 1980 they were not enough. The changing times can also be captured in slight but incredibly telling ways. Watergate and the ethics of those in power was an important issue in the Carter-Ford debates. It was no longer an issue in the Carter-Reagan debate.

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[24] The following comparison of the 1980, 1976 and 1960 presidential debates is based upon the data of the present study as well as data reported in Ellsworth, "Rationality and Campaigning"; and Riley, Hollihan, and Cooley, "The 1976 Presidential Debates."

As presidential debates appear to have been institutionalized with the precedent set for incumbent presidents to participate, further research into their nature and effects is necessary. Most early polls of the 1980 debates judged them to be "draws," but their eventual impact on the campaign was claimed to be much greater by many post-election analysts.[25] The relationship between candidates' abilities to effectively argue their positions and the winning or losing of an election is obviously an area deserving intense investigation. This study is a start.

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[25] Goodwin Berquist and James Golden point out that the media presented a "second wave" of debate evaluations beginning a few days after the event and continuing until the election. This "second wave" of news reports uniformly declared Reagan the winner of the debate. See Berquist and Golden, "Media Rhetoric, Criticism and the Public Perception of the 1980 Presidential Debates," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 67 (May 1981), *in press*.

HOW REAGAN "WON" THE CLEVELAND DEBATE: AUDIENCE PREDISPOSITIONS AND PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE "WINNERS"

DAVID A. LEUTHOLD AND DAVID C. VALENTINE

Debates have been held in three of the last six presidential elections. Usually candidates will agree to debate only when the election is close and when they see an opportunity to win votes by debating. Thus, while debates may have other functions such as informing voters, they occur because each candidate is trying to implement his campaign strategy. The goal is to win votes.

Our thesis is that candidates win votes not only by their debate performance but also by being declared the winner. The media declare the winners largely on the basis of the surveys of viewers immediately following the debate, and those surveys have shown that supporters of a candidate are likely to say that their candidate won the debate. In 1960 and 1976 approximately equal proportions of supporters for each candidate watched the debate. But in 1980 Reagan supporters were a little more likely to watch, so that Reagan was a little more likely to "win," all other things being equal. This difference, which was important but not critical in 1980, alerts us to the importance of audience predispositions as a determinant of who won the debate.

Academic commentators on presidential debates sometimes decry the media's effort to declare a "winner" because it tends to transform an event which the sponsors hoped would be educational into a kind of contest.[1] While such objections have some merit, it would be difficult (if not impossible) to stifle the search for debate "winners" by broadcast and print journalists—and by the candidates themselves. Presidential debates are political events and politicians certainly appreciate the importance of being declared "the winner" in surveys of viewers.

In 1980 the Carter camp reportedly feared that it might "lose" a debate in terms of immediate public opinion polls and therefore wanted the Reagan-Carter debate to take place at least a week before the election so that they could counter the impression that Reagan had won. Carter's pollster, Patrick Caddell, remarked to one journalist shortly after the debate: "We learned in '76 that people are driven by who they think other people think won the debate—by what they hear about who's the winner. That especially helped Carter in '76. That's why we wanted this debate as early as possible—because we'd be seen as losing, and we'd need more time [to recover]."[2]

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[1] See, for example, Goodwin F. Berquist and James L. Golden, "Media Rhetoric, Criticism, and the Public Perception of the 1980 Presidential Debates," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 67 (May 1981), *in press*.

[2] Caddell as quoted by Elizabeth Drew in "A Reporter at Large—1980: The Election," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 1, 1980, p. 179.

As one of Reagan's debate advisors points out elsewhere in this issue, the Reagan campaign carefully orchestrated post-debate evaluations by their spokesmen to encourage the preception that Reagan had "won."[3] Presumably, the Carter campaign was doing the same thing.

In short, so long as there are presidential debates, there will be a natural and probably irresistible drive to promptly determine a "winner." This being the case, both political practitioners and observers need a basis for predicting who will "win." In this regard, audience predispositions seem a key factor.

The Importance of Audience Predispositions

Although analyses of previous presidential debates have given little attention to the predispositions of the audience, the importance of those predispositions is suggested by various sources. One is the literature on persuasion. The theoretical model for analysis of persuasion constructed by Irving Janis includes the predispositions of the audience as an important factor, along with the characteristics of the message, communicator, media and situation.[4] Raymond Bauer expanded upon this point by noting that some efforts to change people's views had the unintended effect of reinforcing the original predispositions.[5]

The importance of predispositions has also been demonstrated in voter behavior research. Study after study has found party loyalty to be a dominant factor, with attempts at persuasion having limited effect.[6] A study of the 1948 election, for example, found that the percent of voters who switched to the opposite party between August and November was identical (9 percent) among those who were contacted by a worker from the opposite party, among those contacted by a worker from their own party, and among those contacted by neither party.[7]

Studies of presidential debates suggest that their principal effect is to reinforce the viewer's predispositions. Elihu Katz and Jacob Feldman reviewed five different studies that asked about pre- and post-debate attitudes toward the 1960 candidates. The studies showed that 25 to 57 percent of the Republicans became more favorable toward Nixon after the debate while only 6 to 25 percent became more favorable to Kennedy. Similarly, 23 to 72 percent of the Democrats became more favorable to Kennedy

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[3] See Myles Martel, "Debate Preparations in the Reagan Camp: An Insider's View" earlier in this issue of *Speaker and Gavel*.

[4] Irving L. Janis, "Persuasion," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1968), vol. 12, p. 57.

[5] Raymond A. Bauer, "The Obstinate Audience: The Influence Process from the Point of View of Social Communication," *American Psychologist* 19 (May 1964), 321.

[6] See, for example, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954); and Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960).

[7] Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, *Voting*, p. 175.

while only 11 to 15 percent became more favorable to Nixon.[8] This tendency is rooted in the well established communication phenomenon of selective perception by audience members. As a natural result of the viewers' desire to maintain a balance among cognitions, they will selectively attend to televised presidential debates and will tend to remember that which is consistent with their predispositions concerning the candidates.[9]

Research on the debates has also indicated that the supporters of each candidate are likely to conclude that their candidate won. Despite the consensus from fifteen different studies that in 1976 Ford had won the first debate and Carter the second and third, surveys taken after each debate by Associated Press and by Public Broadcasting System/Roper found supporters asserting that their candidate won. In each case at least 56 percent of the candidate's supporters said that he won, and no more than 32 percent said that his opponent won, despite the substantial variations in candidate performance.[10] Similarly, Katz and Feldman, in summarizing the 1960 literature concluded that "there is a marked tendency to choose one's own candidate as the winner."[11] In eight different surveys from which they drew data, the median percentage of Republicans or Nixon supporters who thought Nixon won the first debate was 42 percent, while the median percentage who thought Kennedy won was 17 percent. Among Democrats or Kennedy supporters, the median percentage who thought Kennedy won was 68 percent, while the median percentage who thought Nixon won was 4 percent.

In sum, viewing presidential debates tends to maintain or reinforce previous positive or negative attitudes toward the candidates. Consequently, assuming the two candidates' performance is roughly equivalent, viewers tend to report that their favored candidate won the debate.

Application to the Carter-Reagan Debate

These patterns were repeated in 1980. The reinforcement of previously held views was demonstrated in research we conducted at the University of Missouri–Columbia (UMC). Fifty-five respondents, almost all college students and mostly junior and senior political science majors, watched the Carter-Reagan debate together and completed questionnaires before and after the debate. One question asked was, "If he is elected, how good or poor a president do you think (Carter/Reagan) will make during the

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[8] Elihu Katz and Jacob J. Feldman, "The Debates in the Light of Research: A Survey of Surveys," in *The Great Debates: Background—Perspective—Effects*, ed. Sidney Kraus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 206–207. See also James A. Anderson *et al.*, "An Analysis of Changes in Voter Perception of Candidate Positions," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Dec. 1977, Washington, D.C.; and Alan Abramowitz, "The Impact of a Presidential Debate on Voter Rationality," *American Journal of Political Science*, 22 (1978), 680–690.

[9] For a study of the impact of the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates which supports these generalizations, see Hans Sebold, "Limitations of Communication: Mechanisms of Image Maintenance in the Form of Selective Perception, Selective Memory, and Selective Distortion," *Journal of Communication*, 12 (1962), 142–149.

[10] David O. Sears and Steven H. Chaffee, "Uses and Effects of the 1976 Debates: An Overview of Empirical Studies," in *The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976*, ed. Sidney Kraus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 237–239.

[11] Katz and Feldman, "The Debates in the Light of Research," pp. 198–199.

1981–1985 term?" Before the debate, 74 percent of the students estimated that their favored candidate would be either "somewhat good" or "very good," while only 5 percent judged that his opponent would be "somewhat good" or "very good." After the debate, positive evaluations of the favored candidate increased slightly to 77 percent, but the evaluations of the opponent remained unchanged.

The tendency of supporters to assert that their own candidate had won was also found in other public opinion data in 1980. A CBS News national survey found that 82 percent of the viewers who supported Reagan thought that he had won. Of those who supported Carter beforehand, 69 percent thought that he had won the debate.[12] These data indicate that viewers are not impartial debate judges but partisans who find themselves more in agreement with their candidate's arguments than with his opponent's statements. During the course of the debate, UMC students were asked to score how convinced or impressed they were by each statement by each candidate. Viewers consistently gave their preferred candidate higher scores than they gave the opposing candidate. This consistent reinforcement will enhance each viewers support for his own candidate.

Finally, the 1980 data showed one other pattern of distinct importance—Reagan supporters were more likely than Carter supporters to watch the debate. The CBS News survey found that 86 percent of the Reagan supporters watched the debate compared with 81 percent of the Carter supporters. Furthermore, Reagan supporters were more likely to watch all ninety minutes of the debate.[13] The Associated Press survey data were not as specific, but the patterns were apparently the same. The Associated Press reported that Reagan's victory was "principally the product of more Reagan supporters watching the debate than Carter backers."[14]

The general findings can be summarized as: 1) exposure to the debate reinforces opinions; 2) supporters tend to report that their candidate won; and 3) an imbalance existed between the proportion of Reagan and Carter supporters in the audience. These findings help to explain Reagan's success in the 1980 debate. Reagan was declared the winner by four different surveys conducted immediately following the debate. CBS News and Associated Press each interviewed people before the debate and reinterviewed about one thousand people immediately afterward. CBS found that 44 percent of the viewers thought Reagan had won, while 36 percent thought Carter had won. For the Associated Press the figures were 44 percent to 34 percent in favor of Reagan. In a phone-in survey conducted by ABC News, 727,328 viewers favored Reagan by a two-to-one margin as the candidate who "gained most by his performance in the debate." Viewers of Warner Amex's Qube system in Columbus, Ohio, thought (by a margin of two and a half to one) that Reagan had won. The importance of the predispositions of the audience was indicated by the fact that the Qube audience divided two to one for Reagan before the debate.

The discovery of the difference in the predispositions of the viewing audience in 1980 led us to review the data on audience preferences in earlier debates. Katz and Feldman noted several studies that found almost equally high proportions of Nixon and Kennedy supporters watching the

[12] "CBS News Poll October 1980 Presidential Debate," CBS News Release, Oct. 29, 1980.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] "Debate Gains Split Equally," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 30 Oct. 1980, p. 1A.

1960 debates.[15] Similarly, our own analysis of the 1960 and 1976 surveys conducted by the University of Michigan indicated that nearly one-half of the audience supported each of the debaters in the earlier debates.[16]

This information on debate viewers clearly suggests that some unusual characteristics of the 1980 campaign contributed to the larger proportion of Reagan supporters watching the debate and, hence, to the perception that Reagan won. The unique feature of the 1980 campaign was the candidacy of Ronald Reagan. According to pollster Lou Harris, Reagan supporters tended to be more intense in support of their candidate than were Carter supporters.[17] This intensity of commitment would have made Reagan supporters more likely to watch the debate and more likely to watch all of it, more likely to call ABC to report their preference and, we suspect, more likely to claim that their candidate had won the debate.

That Reagan supporters are more intense is not a new phenomenon. Data drawn from the 1976 national survey conducted by the University of Michigan, using the "feeling thermometer," revealed that Reagan voters in the primaries were more supportive of their candidate than were those voting for Carter or Ford. The intensity of Reagan's supporters reflects the characteristics of the groups that served as the base for his candidacy. Throughout his long campaign for the presidency, Reagan drew upon the more conservative wing of the Republican party for his support. Previous research has demonstrated that conservatives and Republicans are more active in politics than are other groups.[18]

Effects of Media Analysis

We have reviewed evidence suggesting that Reagan supporters were more likely to watch the debate and that their support for Reagan helped make him the winner of the debate as declared by the media. But did this declaration help Reagan win votes? Ted Koppel of ABC News maintained that the only intent of the ABC phone-in survey was to elicit an "honest, quick reaction" and that he did not believe that the survey had affected the election.[19]

Research on previous debates, however, has indicated that media analyses do affect viewer attitudes. Steven Chaffee and Jack Dennis, after reviewing the relevant research literature, conclude that "popular perceptions of Ford's victory in the first debate, and of Carter's in the second, were much stronger the day following each debate than on the previous evening immediately after the debate ended. It may well be that the press's interpretation of the debate, based on its initial information as to

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[15] Katz and Feldman, "The Debates in the Light of Research," p. 191.

[16] These data were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, originally collected by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented in this article.

[17] "ABC Takes Flak for Post-Debate Phone Survey," *Broadcasting* (Nov. 3, 1980), p. 25.

[18] See Philip Converse, Aage R. Clausen, and Warren E. Miller, "Electoral Myth and Reality: The 1964 Election," *American Political Science Review*, 59 (1965), 332–335; and Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 224–228.

[19] "ABC Takes Flak for Post-Debate Phone Survey," p. 25.

the apparent victor, is more important in determining the impact on the electorate than is the debate itself."[20]

Certainly this conclusion is supported by the analyses of the second 1976 debate, in which viewers polled immediately after the debate thought Ford had won, while viewers polled after a day of media commentary about Ford's gaffe concerning the independence of Eastern Europe thought Carter had won.[21] Similarly, the effect of the immediate media analysis may have been reflected in the ABC-Lou Harris survey, conducted the evening after the debate, which found that viewers considered Reagan the winner by a 46 percent to 26 percent margin.[22] This margin, greater than that found in the earlier Associated Press and CBS News polls, may have reflected the increased awareness by the public that other people considered Reagan the winner.

These points, however, do not prove that Reagan won votes by being declared the debate winner by the media. Furthermore, we know of no research that would provide definitive support for that assertion. The logic, however, seems to us to support the assumption that Reagan's having been declared the winner would make more people—particularly nonviewers and those unable to identify a winner—consider him the winner. Furthermore, his recognition as the debate winner may have been taken by some as an indication of the competence needed to govern. Winning the debate also suggested that Reagan was winning the campaign, giving undecided voters a bandwagon that they could climb aboard.

Conclusions and Implications

While the data do not unequivocally prove our point, they do suggest that the polls showing that Reagan won the 1980 debate were skewed by the larger proportion of Reagan supporters in the audience. These supporters—conservative Republican activists who participated heavily in other political activities—are likely to have stated that their candidate won, thus giving Reagan his edge not on the basis of his debate performance but on the basis of the characteristics of the audience. Those immediate results reported in the ABC News phone-in survey and in the Associated Press and CBS News surveys may have affected other people so that increasing proportions of the public came to believe that Reagan had won.

If our theory underlying this interpretation is correct, certain implications for future debates follow:

1. The candidate with the most supporters in the debate audience is likely to be considered the winner, all other things being equal. This

[20] Steven H. Chaffee and Jack Dennis, "Presidential Debates: An Empirical Assessment," in *The Past and Future of Presidential Debates*, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), p. 85.

[21] Richard B. Cheney, "The 1976 Presidential Debates: A Republican Perspective," in *The Past and Future of Presidential Debates*, pp. 127–128. Also see Frederick T. Steeper, "Public Response to Gerald Ford's Statements on Eastern Europe in the Second Debate," in *The Presidential Debates: Media, Electoral and Policy Perspectives*, eds. George F. Bishop, Robert G. Meadow and Marilyn Jackson-Beeck (New York: Praeger, 1978), pp. 81–101.

[22] "Carter Is Bullish Despite Polls," *The Philadelphia Bulletin*, 31 Oct. 1980, p. A-1.

means that a candidate with a substantial lead in the polls is likely to be considered the winner, and to profit the most, if he performs as well as his opponent.

2. If the numbers of supporters of each candidate are equal, the candidate with the most intense supporters is likely to be considered the winner. The intense supporters will be more likely to watch and to declare their candidate the winner.
3. If the numbers of supporters are equal, the conservative Republican candidate is likely to be declared the winner, because his conservative Republican supporters will be more active, and this activity will include watching the debates and declaring their candidate the winner.

While this analysis does not enhance the myth of presidential debates as grand devices for informing the electorate, these implications do provide strategic information to campaign planners, interpretive information to the news media, and explanatory information to the rest of us—the over 100 million viewers of televised presidential debates.

FORM AND SUBSTANCE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FIVE FORMATS USED IN THE 1980 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

SUSAN A. HELLWEG AND STEVEN L. PHILLIPS

The presidential debates have become an important part of American politics. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that these debates are viewed by a considerable number of people[1] and have an important impact upon voting decisions.[2] The fact that they have acquired such importance has lead political scientists, mass media specialists, and communication researchers to study them in great detail.[3]

Since the debates appear to influence voters in making up their minds about candidates, much has been written about their formats, specifically, concerning their ability to allow for the adequate dissemination of appropriate information to the American public and their ability to provide a fair vehicle to the candidates who are endeavoring to convey their political messages.[4] A variety of recommendations have been made in regard to how the format of these debates could be improved, with no particular consensus on an "ideal" format in sight.[5]

The purpose of this article is to provide a comparative analysis of the 1980 presidential debate formats. Five debates in particular will be incorporated in this discussion, specifically the Republican primary debates held in Iowa, South Carolina, and Texas, and the two major post-convention debates in Baltimore and Cleveland.[6]

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[1] See, for example, Frank Stanton, "An Appeal to the American People," *TV Guide*, January 14–20, 1961, p. 26; and John P. Robinson, "The Polls" in *The Great Debates: Carter vs. Ford, 1976*, ed. Sidney Kraus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 262–268.

[2] See, for example, Steven H. Chaffee, "Presidential Debates—Are They Helpful to Voters?" *Communication Monographs*, 45 (1978), 330–346.

[3] See, for example, Sidney Kraus, ed., *The Great Debates: Background—Perspective—Effects* [Kennedy vs. Nixon] (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); Kraus, *The Great Debates* (Carter-Ford); and Lloyd Bitzer and Theodore Rueter, *Carter vs. Ford: The Counterfeit Debates of 1976* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).

[4] See, for example, Jim Karayn, "Presidential Debates: A Plan for the Future," in *The Great Debates* (Carter-Ford), pp. 209–219; Bitzer and Rueter, *Carter vs. Ford*, pp. 193–250; Sidney Kraus, "Presidential Debates in 1964," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 50 (1964), 19–23; Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover, "Presidential Debates: An Overview," in *The Past and Future of Presidential Debates*, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), pp. 191–214; and David Sendler, "A New Plan for Presidential Debates," *TV Guide*, March 8, 1980, pp. 4–10.

[5] See Bitzer and Rueter, *Carter vs. Ford*, p. 225, as well as other sources cited in note 4.

[6] The two televised debates excluded from this analysis are the ones held in New Hampshire and Illinois among the Republican primary contenders. These omis-

The televised presidential debates of 1960, 1976, and 1980 have provided the American public an alternative source of information about the candidates. These events have allowed the public to view opposing candidates in a single context simultaneously. Through these debates, the voters have had the opportunity to see the candidates for an extended period of time. Only through television programs such as "Meet the Press," "Face the Nation," or "Issues and Answers" does the public otherwise have the opportunity to see a candidate discuss his positions at length. Nightly news media coverage, for example, does not afford the viewer this opportunity. The debates, however, have allowed the public to compare candidates.

In addition, these debates have not only served as a means to inform the electorate, but they probably have also elevated the quality of public dialogue. From the standpoint of campaign expenditures, these debates have most likely given the candidates the opportunity to speak to the largest and most attentive audience at the least expense; as the cost of campaign traveling increases, these debates will become even more important in their function.

A debate may be defined as a type of discourse involving two or more persons who offer competing positions in regard to a particular issue or issues. This discourse normally involves the affirmation and denial of a proposition in some or all respects by contenders through the use of supporting argumentation. In designing the format for a televised presidential debate, a number of important factors must be taken into consideration. Each of these factors greatly influences the quality of such debates and has particularly affected the three series of presidential debates held since 1960.

First, debates do not serve the public well when they simply encourage candidates to "score" against one another, rather than actually debate. This tendency in past televised debates has resulted in part from the formats which have made the events appear like "boxing matches" and in part because of the way in which the media has covered them. In an attempt to interpret these events, the media has sometimes relied upon a "winner-loser" orientation.

Another potential problem occurs when the debate format encourages short answers which resound "worn commonplaces" heard frequently in the campaign.[7] Often absent from these responses are well-developed and thoughtful arguments. The advantage, of course, to the candidate who can use packaged commonplaces effectively is that he can deliver his messages rapidly in polished form, using various tested appeals.

The role of the panelists provides an additional source of potential difficulty. If the panelists simply pose propositions from which the contenders can develop arguments, then a true debate occurs. The tendency in past presidential debates has been for the panelists to enter somewhat of a third party role, taking up quite a bit of time in asking questions, directing some hostility toward the candidates in the content of their ques-

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sions, however, should not particularly compromise the generality of the conclusions drawn in this study, because the New Hampshire debate format was similar to the one employed in the Iowa debate and the Illinois format generally paralleled the South Carolina debate.

[7] The term "worn commonplaces" has been adopted for this discussion from Bitzer and Rueter, *Carter vs. Ford*, pp. 132–135.

tioning, and choosing questions which do not invite debate. Oftentimes, panelists' questions have seemed more a reflection of the interest of a particular panelist than general electoral issues. Panelists have frequently been guilty of asking multiple questions within the framework of a single question, making it difficult for a candidate to respond. The debates have often seemed more like press conferences than debates, with panelists asking candidates questions and candidates responding to the questions, rather than debating one another.

The panelists have served as agenda setters for some of the debates, often pressuring the candidates with hostile or one-sided questions into submissive responses, acting as though their role was to "unmask" the candidates. In addition, the line of questioning has at times taken somewhat of a transitory approach, rather than a view toward long-range perspectives.

On a more technical level, there are format considerations which relate to speaker time, speaker rotation, the use of opening and closing statements, the use of rebuttals and restatement of questions, and the use of notes by the contenders. Although these considerations may seem trivial to the casual observer, the candidates properly consider them to be vitally important. Obviously, a candidate must adapt quickly to the constraints of the format. This involves realizing the consequences of the particular debate format chosen. In terms of speaker rotation, for example, the candidate must consider his opportunity to defend his own position, to point out the weaknesses of the arguments advanced by his opponent, to generate his own agenda—all of which must be accomplished with agility and proper tactics.

The 1980 presidential campaign offered an expanded version of the 1960 and 1976 debates. In this case, there was an effort to provide the American public with primary debates, as well as post-convention presidential debates. There were no Democratic primary debates (due to President Carter's insistence that his foreign affairs responsibilities prevented his participation), but five Republican televised primary debates did materialize.

The Republicans, with seven viable candidates announcing their intention to run for the Presidency (in contrast to three Democratic contenders), endeavored to assist voters in making distinctions between candidates (and offer them nationwide visibility) through a series of five primary debates between January and April 1980 in various American cities. This was an important decision because the incumbent President was a Democrat, and some of the seven Republican contenders were relatively unknown to a nationwide audience.

Republican primary debates were televised from Iowa, New Hampshire, Illinois, South Carolina, and Texas, with some, but not all, of the candidates appearing in each. All seven candidates appeared in at least one of these speaking events. The general aim, of course, of each of these candidates was to stand out among the others and yet participate in solidifying the Republican Party.*

Two post-convention presidential debates were sponsored by the League of Women Voters—the first between Republican candidate Ronald Reagan and independent candidate John Anderson in Baltimore (President Carter withdrawing from the debate) and the second between Dem-

* John Anderson, of course, eventually parted from his Republican colleagues, but he continued to contribute to the image of a united Republican Party until the Illinois debate.

ocratic candidate Jimmy Carter and Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in Cleveland (Anderson being eliminated from the debate because of an insufficient ranking in the political polls).[9]

The Iowa Debate

The Iowa Republican Debate, the first in the series of five televised primary debates, was held on January 5, 1980 at the Des Moines Civic Center. Six Republican candidates participated in the event: Congressman Philip Crane, Senator Howard Baker, Congressman John Anderson, former Governor John Connally, Senator Robert Dole, and former Ambassador George Bush. James Gannon of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune* served as the moderator. The panelists included two local journalists and two national journalists: Richard Doak of the *Des Moines Tribune*, Mary McGrory of the *Washington Star*, George Anthan of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, and Walter Mears of the Associated Press.

The two-hour debate featured the following question and answer format: (1) In the initial segment, panelists took turns asking the candidates questions, with the first candidate getting two minutes to answer, then each of the other five candidates getting one minute to respond or comment on the question. (2) In the second segment, audience members asked the candidates questions, with each candidate getting one minute to respond. (3) In the third segment, the audience members asked questions of single candidates, with the candidate addressed getting one minute to respond. (4) In the final segment, each of the six candidates was given the opportunity for a three-minute closing statement.

Ten questions were posed by the panelists in the initial eighty-minute segment. Four of the six candidates were initial respondents for two questions, while the other two candidates did so only once (Dole and Bush). The second and third segments (audience questions) lasted approximately twenty minutes, with two questions asked by audience members of all the candidates and eight questions asked of individual candidates. Dole and Bush were provided with one more audience member question in the third segment than the others. The final segment, consisting of closing statements by the candidates, lasted eighteen minutes.

Generally speaking, all the candidates were treated equally, with the exception of the Dole-Bush questioning noted for the first and third segments. Because the additional questions to Bush and Dole in the third segment compensated for the first segment, the total available speaking time for each candidate was the same—eighteen minutes. Candidates were rotated in terms of speaking order, so that the initial respondent was different through each group of six questions.

The format provided for a relatively formal presentation, although there was some levity evidenced. No audience applause was permitted in response to candidate comments. The candidates sat behind tables (three at a table), so as to appear as members of a panel discussion rather than individual speakers. The moderator was positioned between the two groups of candidates. The four journalists faced the candidates and the moderator, with their backs to the audience.

Developing an effective debate format around six candidates is, of

[9] The following analysis of debate formats is based upon video-tapes of the televised broadcasts.

course, difficult. Because of the inflexible structure of the debate and the routine questioning, it was difficult to distinguish the Republican candidates, who were not only trying to stand apart from the others, but also aiming to solidify their party. The allowance for some levity and informality did provide for some escape from traditional, "packaged" expression without sacrificing the serious intent of the debate itself. The number of questions raised did afford a wide variety of topics to be discussed, so that a comparison (at least to some degree) of the candidates was possible.

The South Carolina Debate

The South Carolina Republican Debate, the third in the series of televised primary debates, was held on February 28, 1980 in the Longstreet Theater on the campus of the University of South Carolina in Columbia. Four Republican candidates participated in the event: former Governor Ronald Reagan, Baker, Connally, and Bush. Jim Lehrer of the Public Broadcasting System moderated the affair, which included four panelists (again, two local journalists and two national journalists): Jack Germond of the *Washington Star*, Lee Bandy of *The State* and *The Columbian Record*, William Raspberry of the *Washington Post*, and Kent Krell of *The Columbian Record*.

In contrast to all of the other 1980 debates analyzed here, the South Carolina debate featured the participants in a setting that approximated a boxing ring, with the audience surrounding them and successively elevated. Two of the candidates sat on opposite sides of the stage, with the other two on the third side, all evenly spaced with regard to one another. The journalists divided evenly and sat in the proximity of the two of the corners with tables in front of them; the moderator sat with a small lecturn and table in front of him between the groups of panelists. The participants were positioned essentially in a circular pattern. The appearance was somewhat informal; the intent seemed to be to make the event seem conversational, rather than adversarial.

The following question and answer format was imposed: (1) In the initial segment, the journalists asked the candidates questions, with the first respondent given two minutes to answer and subsequent candidates given one minute to respond or comment on the question (as was the case in the Iowa debate). (2) In the second segment, each panelist directed a different question to each of the four contenders, the candidates having one minute to respond. (3) In the third segment, the moderator addressed follow-up questions to the candidates (two successively to each candidate) with each candidate having one minute to respond. (4) In the final segment, the four candidates had the opportunity to offer two-minute closing statements.

Eight questions were asked in the initial segment. Each candidate was the initial respondent for two of these questions. Sixteen questions were posed in the second segment, four by each journalist, with one from each journalist to each candidate. The third segment featured eight follow-up questions, with two for each of the four contenders. Finally, all candidates gave a closing statement. A total of eighteen minutes of speaking time was provided to each candidate, as was the case in the Iowa debate.

No audience questions were utilized in the South Carolina debate. Follow-up questions, however, were an additional feature. The questions posed in the South Carolina debate had slightly more intimidating and personalized overtones than those in the Iowa debate, such as the questioning directed at Bush about his handling of the New Hampshire debate. The follow-up questions posed by the moderator and the questions posed

by the journalists during the second segment were directed generally at concerns associated with the particular candidate involved.

Because there were only four candidates instead of six (as was the case in the Iowa debate) it was easier for viewers to make distinctions among the contenders. The format, however, was rather structured, so that it was difficult for the candidates to really debate one another; they were forced into simply attempting to answer the specific questions posed by journalists and moderator.

While informative, the debate seemed to serve the purpose of a press conference, the principal advantage being that the viewers had an opportunity to contrast answers among candidates to certain questions. Generally speaking, the challenges given to candidates were provided by those asking the questions, not the other contenders. The allowance, once again, for some degree of informality lent to the lessening of an otherwise stiff performance by candidates.

The Texas Debate

The Texas Republican Debate, the fifth in the series of televised primary debates, was held on April 23, 1980 at the Albert Thomas Convention Center in Houston. The two remaining Republican candidates participated in the event: Ronald Reagan and George Bush, two contenders who were later, of course, to join as Republican running mates against the Carter-Mondale ticket. News correspondent Howard K. Smith moderated the debate; there was no panel of questioners for this debate.

The Texas debate offered strong contrast to the other debates involved in this analysis. The moderator played, on the whole, a minimal role in the interaction between the two candidates. The format for the sixty-minute debate provided for relatively open discussion and freedom of direction. Subjects were generally initiated by the moderator, although candidates were free to address questions to one another.

There were no limitations on candidate speaking time during the debate. The only exception was a one-minute limitation imposed upon each candidate for his closing statement. Just prior to these statements, the candidates were given four questions from the audience. At the beginning of the debate the audience was permitted to react audibly to comments of the candidates, but at an early point in the program the moderator advised the audience against reacting to the proceedings. Apparently the format was designed so that (to the degree possible) the debate would appear as a conversation between Reagan and Bush for the benefit of the viewing audience. The staging of the debate, however, was relatively formal. The candidates stood behind podiums on the stage with the moderator between them.

As it turned out, Reagan provided twenty-six candidate messages for a total of approximately twenty-five and a half minutes; Bush offered eighteen candidate messages for a total of approximately nineteen and a half minutes. By not structuring the candidate message plan, Reagan seized the opportunity to speak six more minutes than Bush. However, this was due in part to some questions from the moderator to Reagan about the accuracy of figures he had used in campaign presentations.

Because of the lack of a restricting structure, the candidates had ample time to convey their positions, could attack arguments presented by the opponent, and clarify misconceptions about themselves. This type of format, basically non-directive, seems to allow for maximal content on issues, particularly when the moderator simply presents topics for discussion, al-

most in the sense of stating debatable propositions. It is important to note, however, that because the candidates held similar positions on almost every issue, the debate became only minimally confrontational.

The Baltimore Debate

The Baltimore Debate, the first of two post-convention presidential debates, was held on September 21, 1980 in the Baltimore Convention Center. Two presidential candidates were present: Ronald Reagan and John Anderson. Bill Moyers of the Public Broadcasting System moderated the program. The format included a panel of six journalists: Carol Loomis of *Fortune Magazine*; Daniel Greenberg, a syndicated columnist; Charles Corddry of the *Baltimore Sun*; Lee May of the *Los Angeles Times*; Jane Bryant Quinn of *Newsweek Magazine*; and Soma Golden of the *New York Times*.

The one-hour debate featured the following question and answer format: (1) Six questions were asked of the candidates by the six journalists. (2) The initial respondent (candidate A) was given two and a half minutes to provide an answer. (3) The journalist involved then restated the question. (4) the second respondent (candidate B) was then given two and a half minutes to answer the question. (5) Candidate A was given one minute and fifteen seconds to respond. (6) Candidate B was then given one minute and fifteen seconds to respond. Anderson and Reagan alternated in terms of being the first to respond to a question. Following the six questions, each candidate was provided the opportunity for a three-minute closing statement. Each candidate was, therefore, given twenty-seven minutes to convey his positions.

In contrast to the other debates discussed thus far, this one offered only six questions, possibly minimizing the number of issues which could be brought forth in the interaction. This debate did not feature follow-up questions. Apparently because questioning was confined to this restrictive format, panelists addressed multiple questions to the candidates within the framework of single questions. Rebuttals were possible, however, with four messages (two per candidate) emerging for each question. Some of the questions were rather one-sided and limiting. This debate was quite formal in staging, with the two candidates standing behind podiums and the panel of journalists and the moderator together facing the candidates, their backs to the audience.

The Cleveland Debate

The Cleveland Democratic-Republican Debate was held on October 28, 1980 (one week before the General Election) in the Cleveland Convention Center. Two presidential candidates participated: President Jimmy Carter and former Governor Ronald Reagan. The program included a panel of four journalists: Marvin Stone of *U.S. News and World Report*, Harry Ellis of the *Christian Science Monitor*, William Hilliard of the *Portland Oregonian*, and Barbara Walters of ABC News. Howard K. Smith moderated the debate.

The ninety-minute debate featured a complex question and answer format: (1) In the initial segment, various questions were posed by the journalists to the candidates, with the question going to candidate A, then a response from candidate A, then a follow-up question, then a response from candidate A. At this point the question was restated to candidate B, followed by a response from candidate B, a follow-up question, then a response from candidate B. Finally, a rebuttal was presented by each can-

didate (first from candidate A and then from candidate B). (2) In the second segment, the same procedure was used, with the omission of follow-up questions. (3) In the final segment, three-minute closing statements were provided by each candidate. As with the Baltimore debate, time limitations were imposed upon all speaking opportunities of the candidates.

Each question in the first and second parts of the debate offered the candidates each three opportunities to speak. Rebuttals were a feature of the first two debate segments, follow-up questions were only a feature of the initial segment. Two rebuttals per candidate were possible in the second segment because an additional rebuttal replaced the follow-up question that had been included in the first segment of the debate.[10]

Four principal questions were posed in the initial segment, each accompanied by a follow-up question. In the second segment, another four questions were asked. In essence, then, eight principal questions were posed by the journalists, two by each panelist. Once again, the journalists were unable to resist the temptation to formulate multiple questions within a format that required single questions.

The format of the Reagan-Carter debate created an extremely formal atmosphere similar to that found in the Reagan-Anderson debate. Both of these forums were staged in the tradition of the presidential debates of 1960 and 1976. The panelists and the moderator in the Cleveland debate faced the two candidates, with their backs to the audience. The two contenders stood behind podiums on the stage with a blue curtain behind them. No audience reaction was permitted during the course of the debate. Candidates were allowed to use only those notes that they composed during the course of the debate.

The advantages of follow-up questions and rebuttals were evidenced in the information provided in the debate by the candidates. Though the panelists' questions were catalytic in nature, there still was a sense that the candidates were answering the journalists' questions, rather than debating one another. This debate offered the candidates substantially more speaking time than did the one in Baltimore; the Cleveland debate was ninety minutes in length, the Baltimore debate was sixty minutes in length.

Summary

The purpose of this article has been to compare and contrast the formats employed in five of the 1980 presidential debates and to thus discuss the issue of debate formats in general.

Since the format imposed upon a debate can affect the presentation of information provided to viewers and since the presidential debates have become a significant event in the campaign process, it is important to analyze various optional formats and to consider carefully formats which are developed for future such encounters.

Upon examination of the 1980 debates, the range of formats becomes clear. The rigidity and structure of the two post-convention debates seem in line with the importance of those bipartisan events. The earlier Republican primary debates would seem to have the luxury of being more flexible, experimental, and informal. The potential for confrontation, however, was inherently less among the various Republican candidates in the primary

[10] For an outline of this unusually complex debate format, see Table 3 of Myles Martel's essay, "Debate Preparations in the Reagan Camp: An Insider's View," which appears in this issue of *Speaker and Gavel*.

elections. Conversely, the greater potential for confrontation was present in the bipartisan debates, but not fully realized because of the rigid format.

It is difficult to determine which debate format offered the most information to its viewers. Some of these debate formats provided for interference by the panelists. Indeed, the panelists almost became third parties in some forums. The Texas debate certainly offered the candidates the most freedom from interference by panelists. In a few debates, intimidating questions pervaded the forums, producing defensive and evasive responses from the candidates. Worn commonplaces were an outcome, to some degree, in each of the debates. In all cases except the Texas debate, the restricted format and the absence of clearly stated propositions caused the candidates to be more concerned with answering a journalist's questions than actually debating one another.

In making recommendations for future debates, several considerations emerge. These events need to be designed in such a way as to minimize the involvement of panelists beyond what is necessary to pose propositions through their questions. Panelists certainly should be discouraged from using intimidating or multiple-faceted questions, as these cannot be translated into clear and fairly stated propositions. The "shot-gun" presentation of questions used in press conferences does not seem preferable in debates. The debate questions should be simple, short, and direct. Ideally, each question ought to clearly imply a debatable proposition.

Multiple questions emerged particularly in the two post-convention debates; at the same time, the formats of these debates allowed for fewer opportunities to pose a question than in the primary debates. Obviously, a type of trade-off occurred in the 1980 debates: frequent questions created shorter response times and encouraged a press conference format; less frequent questions encouraged the panelists to hide several questions within the guise of a single question and that made it very difficult for the candidates to present responsive answers within a set time frame. Regrettably, questions in most of the debates analyzed here were often tailored to the initial respondent. This lead to one-sided questioning which discouraged a genuine debate among the candidates. Obviously, this practice needs to be avoided in future debate formats.

Future debates also need to be designed so as to minimize the stiff quality of past debates. Such a change might lessen the tendency of the press and the public at large to view the debates as contests between candidates to see who is the most facile.

Closing statements appear to be an effective device for summarizing what has taken place. Opening statements offer another opportunity for setting the tone of the debate. Opening statements were employed in two of the four Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960 and in the 1976 Vice Presidential debate between Walter Mondale and Robert Dole. Certainly, the restatement of questions was a positive innovation in the 1980 debates, as it refocused attention on the query, helped avoid ambiguity and fostered a debate on the proposition implicit in the question.

Finally, allowing the moderator to introduce various propositions formulated in advance during the debate itself has been suggested by several scholars as a way to improve the debate formats.[11] In this way, the con-

[11] Germond and Witcover, "Presidential Debates: An Overview," p. 201; and Kraus, "Presidential Debates in 1964," p. 22.

tenders might debate more with one another, with the propositions being the vehicle for initiating interaction, rather than questions, and with the moderator monitoring the interaction, rather than a panelist of journalists, who have had a tendency to play too large a role in the process of presidential debating.

The experience of presidential campaign debates in 1980 has provided a wider range of formats from which to choose or modify in the future. The forums in Iowa and New Hampshire provided models for incorporating six or seven candidates into a debate format, while the South Carolina and Illinois debates provided for four contenders. The most interesting contrast in formats occurred between the traditional two-person debates in Baltimore and Cleveland and the innovative two-person debate in Texas. Of course, any format can be misused or abused—whether by the candidates, the moderator, or the panelists. The goal is not to find a "perfect" format for presidential debates, but rather to develop appropriate and productive formats for different campaign situations. Given the innovations of the 1980 forums, there is reason to hope that future presidential debates will employ improved formats and that public argument—however imperfect—will continue to play an important role in American politics.

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